



THE HISTORY OF MARGARET MORTON.

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THE HISTORY OF
MARGARET MORTON.

BY

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THE HISTORY OF MARGARET MORTON.

CHAPTER I.

It would possibly have afforded some consolation to Mrs. Archibald to know that if she was puzzled in her attempts to solve the mystery of Mr. Wynum's proceedings, the vivacious intellect of a Clifton and the shrewd, deliberative spirit of a Green were equally at fault. The perplexity of the two latter-named personages was aggravated by a feeling of mutual distrust, though it must be said of Green that her distrust was based upon a sentiment honourable to humanity in general as well as to the individual who was the immediate object of her thoughts. Green could not believe that Clifton, or anybody else, would be silly enough to nibble again at the bait that had so often betrayed; and therefore, fearing repulse, she forbore to advance. On the other hand, Clifton's distrust was the

offspring of a less generous sentiment. She had been so often out-generalled, out-tricked, and out-witted by the “serpentine” Green, that she dreaded entering into fresh negotiations. Green forbore to make any overture because, having a character to maintain, repulse, however slight, would be nearly fatal ; whilst Clifton, having been so often vanquished, was in the light-hearted condition of one who has nothing to lose. Under these circumstances, each waited, hoping the other would advance ; but Green would not risk the vantage-ground on which she stood, so Clifton, who had been often defeated, grew bold in the consciousness that nothing worse than defeat could again befall her, and very correctly concluded that a defeat, more or less, made little difference to one who had been so often overcome.

Having taken this rational, though somewhat desperate, view of her position, Clifton resolved to run all risks and call on her serpentine neighbour. She did not come to this resolve until she had administered to herself several doses of strong tonics, as motives or excuses for the step she was about to take. There was her duty to the family she had lived with nearly thirty years ; there was her regard for the good Mr. Archibald that had been a kind master to

her ; there was her love for poor dear Master Richard that was being made a fool of ; and with many motives, equally potent, did Clifton urge her hesitating spirit to do what one unacknowledged motive, stronger than all those called forth from the casket of her duty-jewels impelled her to, namely, an intense curiosity to know what was really going on ; and Green, she knew, would be the highest authority on the question.

Notwithstanding the strengthening influences of the deep draught of duties Clifton had imbibed, spite, too, of the propelling force of innate curiosity, she trembled as the moment drew nigh that was to bring her face to face with her serpentine ally. It was in the spirit of concession to her own weakness that she bade Mary to dress Dumpling, as she was going to take her for a walk ; or, rather, it was such a diversion as those who dread the influence of an “evil eye” make when they interpose some object between themselves and the malignant orb. So, a little after seven o’clock on that fine September evening, Clifton took her way towards Mrs. Green’s, Dumpling held fast by her aunt’s hand, little suspecting that she was the protecting power on the occasion. Great was Mrs. Green’s delight at seeing her neighbour,

and with edifying and Christian-like warmth did she set about discharging the duties of hospitality in her regard. Few words had been exchanged before glasses and a bottle of sherry were set on the table. In compliment to Dumpling, Mrs. Green insisted on anticipating supper-time. Consequently, by half-past seven a cold fowl and the remains of a Strasbourg pie were arranged in proper order. As Mrs. Green had allowed her youthful hand-maid to accept an invitation to tea with a neighbour, the twenty minutes that immediately followed Clifton's arrival were, for the most part, occupied by Mrs. Green in preparing supper. This interval was profitable to Clifton, who, during the desultory and common-place remarks which were all the conversation Mrs. Green could indulge in as she passed hither and thither in thrifty haste, found time to recover her confidence, and, further fortified by a couple of glasses of wine, was quite at her ease when she took her place at the supper-table.

“Well, Mrs. Clifton, I’m sure you ’ll believe me when I say I’m glad to see you. Now, I must tell you the truth. I was afraid you was offended the day of the great dinner here because I didn’t pay you enough attention.”

“Oh, Mrs. Green! how could you think so? I

know I speak out of my turn, but this I must say, you 're always attentive to every one. And I 'm sure everything was beautifully done that day : I heard my ladies say so over and over again."

" Well, Mrs. Clifton, I do my best, and the best can do no more. But you 're not eating anything. Take another little piece of this grass pie. 'Tis delicious ! "

" So it is, Mrs. Green, but not a bit more for me."

Dumpling having refused, as steadily as her aunt, to be further helped, Mrs. Green removed the Strasbourg pie, which, during the meal, she had persistently spoken of as though it were a vegetable composition. This being done, the hostess set a decanter on the table, together with hot water, sugar, and glasses.

" Well, Mrs. Green," said Clifton to her friend, now seated at the other side of the table, " you had great goings on here of late —quite fashionable life. You won't be angry with me. I know I speak out of my turn, but I think there 's something going on."

" So do I, too, Mrs. Clifton ; but what is it ? That 's what I ask myself twenty times in the day. Is it a wedding we 're going to have ? You ought to know !—all the young people are at your house."

"You've seen 'em very often in your house of late, Mrs. Green."

"Well, that's true, too. 'Tis hard to say who's going to be married; but I never see such goings-on except for a wedding."

"Maybe, Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum," and Clifton glanced slyly at her friend.

"Maybe so. There's nothing unlikely in these times. But, Mrs. Clifton, let me mix for you. You'll take something hot after that grass pie?"

"Well, I believe 'tis the right thing to do. Not so much! Oh, you're giving me so much!"

"No, indeed, dear, 'tis very weak. Now, Dumpling, come over and let me see you. I hadn't time to take a look at you. And isn't she stout and strong? Oh! what a pretty dress! Who bought you this nice dress? Aunty, I'll be bound?"

"No. I bought it myself with my own money."

"Oh, Dumpling! you're a rich woman, ain't you?"

"Mr. Richard give me two sovereigns, and I bought this dress and a new hat, and lots of things!"

"Good child! That's the best way to spend your money; not buying sweets and dolls."

“Yes; and I’ve a sovereign in my money-box, too, and Mr. Richard give me a lot of shillings.”

“Now, Dumpling,” said her aunt, “you mustn’t tease Mrs. Green, and you mustn’t talk so much. Mr. Richard is very good to you, and so is Mr. Henry.”

“Mr. Henry isn’t so good as Mr. Richard. He only gave me a doll.”

“And isn’t it a beauty? Now run about, and don’t tease Mrs. Green.”

So Dumpling slid off her hostess’s lap, and ran into the front kitchen to watch the return of Mrs. Green’s niece.

“They’re all very good to her,” went on Clifton. “The ladies give her plenty of clothes, and Mr. Henry gave her such a lovely doll.”

“What wonder? You deserve well of ‘em. You’ve served ‘em faithful many a year.”

“That’s true. Them two young men and Miss Margaret grew up under my eyes, and like my own children, I may say.”

“ ’Twill be a good thing for Dumpling when Miss Morton and Mr. Archibald are married,” said Mrs. Green; “there’ll be a sure home for her.”

“Maybe yes, and maybe no. I know I

speak out of my turn, but I wish I saw 'em married, any way. 'Twas their uncle's wish, an' I don't know why any one should gainsay it. I know I speak out of my turn, but I must speak."

"Mrs. Archibald wouldn't try to prevent the marriage?"

"Well, Mrs. Green, there's some people, an' you'll know 'em thirty years an' fifty years, an' you'd know as little of 'em at the end as at the beginning. I know I speak out of my turn, but for my part, when I see things going on I don't like, I put a stop to 'em. That's my way. I know I speak out of my turn, but I know I am speaking to a friend."

"Indeed you are, Mrs. Clifton; but what do you think of these goings on?"

"Well, Mrs. Green, I know I speak out of turn; but this I will say, I don't understand 'em at all. What do you think?"

"I'm sure I can't say. 'Twouldn't be for one to give an opinion, but I *was* surprised to see Miss Morton coming here four days running to dinner, and Cornet Wynum keeping away from her aunt's house."

"Oh, as to that, Mrs. Green, there's nothing in it"—Clifton, to her credit be it said, always stood up for the honour of the Archibal

family—" 'twas merely to oblige Miss Maunsell."

" 'Twas very kind of Miss Morton," said Green, dryly, "to come here to take care of Miss Maunsell."

" I don't mean that," retorted Clifton, sharply; " I only mean there's nothing between my young lady and Cornet Wynum. There couldn't be, Mrs. Green, an' there mustn't be. I speak out of my turn, maybe, but I'd soon let Master Richard know—"

Clifton stopped short. Her " serpentine" gossip slid quietly in with,—

" Perhaps 'tis my old lady and gentleman who are going to make a match of it."

Clifton laughed. Feeling inspirited from various causes, she spoke out more boldly than was her wont,—

" If that was the case, what would they be bringing all these young people about 'em for?"

Green looked sharply at her friend,—

" You're right, Mrs. Clifton, you're right. There's something in it I don't understand; but this I do suspect, that Mr. Wynum is at the bottom of it all. And, if he is, neither Miss Maunsell nor Mrs. Archibald, nor any other missis, will ever make out his meaning till he chooses to tell it himself."

"Mrs. Green, I take your word for it. I know I speak out of my turn, but I submit when them that understands tells me their thoughts."

"Them 's my thoughts, Mrs. Clifton. You know, as well as I can tell you, that you and I and people like us know these ladies and gentlemen better than they know themselves. They 're not on their guard like before us. They say and do things before us they wouldn't say and do before one another. The way I reckon it up is this: they don't think us worth their notice; they don't think of us at all. We 're only like sticks or stones, that can't see or hear; or, what I ought to say is, we 're like beasts of burden, to do their work as if we hadn't sense or feeling."

"Well, Mrs. Green," said Clifton, in whom the feudal spirit of servitude had been nurtured and developed during her thirty years' service, "I don't find fault with my ladies, and still less with my gentlemen. I know I speak out of my turn, but there 's no denying it, Mrs. Archibald *is* rather proud and close-minded, but she 's a good mistress, and I know she has my interest at heart. And poor dear Mr. Archibald! there never was a better master. He wasn't above telling me a great deal of his mind, and over and over again he said to me

he was bringing up a wife for his nephew and a husband for his little niece. I know I speak out of my turn, but 'twould be a bitter day to me if what my dear good master worked hard for shouldn't come to pass."

"And would Mrs. Archibald prevent it?"

"I don't think she would; because this I'll say for her, she never went against her husband, and that's what I don't understand. If she's favourable to Master Richard, why does she ask other young men to the house? I know I speak out of my turn, but you understand me, Mrs. Green. Not a drop more, not a drop—"

"Not take a glass of wine? Oh, you mustn't go yet. 'Tis early. Hark to Dumbley playing with Mary. That child's as lively as if 'twas only three in the afternoon. Just a drop."

"It must be only a very little drop, Mrs. Green. I must be home by half-past nine."

"I suppose you're busy preparing for all the company you'll have to-morrow evening!"

"Company, Mrs. Green! I never heard a word of it."

"Dear me! Well, that does surprise me. I heard it all as I was passing hin and hout yesterday, waiting at table, and doing one

thing or another. Miss Maunsell was talking — poor woman, she's always talking for that matter—and then I heard that Mr. Wynum and the cornet were to be at Mrs. Archibald's to-morrow evening, and Captain Wilmot and Lieutenant Rogers, and, I suppose, all the red-coats they can find; and the French young gentleman and his mother, and all the family."

"I was never told a word of it. I'll go this minute and tell Master Richard." Clifton rose from her chair.

"No, no, Mrs. Clifton, that would be making mischief, and bringing me into a scrape. 'Twouldn't do for people like us to talk out, besides"—laying her hand on Clifton's, who was now leaning back in her chair, apparently quite overcome—"you can't see Master Richard to-night."

"That's true. I know I speak out of my turn, but this I will say, 'tis mean of Master Henry to take part against his cousin. Miss Morton dined here almost every day last week, and Cornet Wynum walked home with her. I hopened the door to 'em myself. No doubt Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum was with 'em; but tell me if you please, Mrs. Green, why Cornet Wynum wouldn't come into our house when he saw the young lady home. I know

I speak out of my turn, but I'll tell every word of it to Master Richard."

"Oh, Mrs. Clifton, 'tis better to go quietly. We don't know what's at the bottom of it. For my part, I say Mr. Wynum is at the bottom of it."

"Well, that's what I say too. And what makes him at the bottom of it, only for the sake of his son? I know I speak out of my turn, but I'm not a fool."

"Mrs. Clifton," said her hostess, calmly, "if Mr. Wynum is at the bottom of it, you'll not get to the bottom of it in a hurry, nor I neither, nor anybody else, except my old gentleman wishes to tell 'em. Believe my words, Mrs. Clifton, I know my old party well."

"I dare say you're right, Mrs. Green. You ought to know 'em well, seeing as you've had 'em under your eyes so long."

"Besides," went on Green, "'tis hard to say what's going on. You haven't heard the best of it yet. Captain Wilmot is to bring his little daughter here to-morrow to visit Miss Maunsell, and they're to take a drive afterwards in the Park. What do you think of that? Is the captain in danger?"

"Oh, that's nonsense you know. He's young enough to be her son."

“Perhaps she don’t know that, or maybe she don’t want to know it.”

Here Mrs. Green laughed heartily; so did Clifton. The latter recovered herself quickly, and said,—

“Miss Maunsell’s a lady, with all her oddities. She wouldn’t be such a fool as to marry a young man, even if he was fool enough to ask her. I’d think very little of any woman that would marry a man younger than herself.”

“Ah, Mrs. Clifton, I’ve seen very queer things in my time, and shall again, I’m pretty sure.”

“A lady wouldn’t do it,” said Clifton, with emphasis.

“Oh, as to that, Mrs. Clifton, I haven’t been so much with ladies and gentlemen maybe as you; but this I’ll say, ladies and gentlemen do very like other people when it comes to the point.”

“Well, Mrs. Green, no doubt you’re right. I know I speak out of my turn, but this I will say, for me a lady’s always a lady, and a gentleman’s always a gentleman.”

Clifton had been long a frequenter of boudoirs, dressing and drawing rooms, and having mastered many of the secrets of these

places, had learned to identify herself with the aristocracy ; but the hard-worked lodging-house keeper, whose intercourse with the upper classes was for the most part limited to being summoned into her own drawing-room to hear imputations cast on her honesty by some item in her bill being questioned, belonged to a sect of social freethinkers, who believe there lies as much meanness, dishonesty, and vice of every kind under titled splendour as beneath nameless rags.

Clifton took leave of her friend that evening more self-satisfied than she had ever been before after so protracted an interview. Her first ground for self-gratulation was, that she had in no way committed herself ; the next was, that Mrs. Green had spoken more freely than she had ever known her to do before. On the whole, Clifton felt she had acquired information, and had no reason for self-reproach.

As to Mrs. Green, she, too, was well satisfied with the general result of the evening's proceedings. True, she had spoken more openly than was her wont, but her communicativeness was in the first instance induced by the conviction that, in order to arrive at the solution of the Wynum mystery—for Wynum she believed it to be—she must step beyond the bounds of

her customary precaution; and in the second place, finding that Clifton was as ignorant as herself with regard to the points in question, and consequently unable to afford her information, she was irritated into an unusual outburst of feeling. One thing, however, was clear, Clifton was strongly attached to the interests, if not actually in the pay, of Richard Archibald.

CHAPTER II.

CLIFTON woke next morning under the influence of the pleasantest of all feelings—self-complacency. She believed she had conducted a difficult negotiation to a very happy issue, and, like many negotiators higher placed, she attributed the success of the affair to her own skill rather than to the pliancy of the opponent who, in order to attain a great end, had abstained from all attempt at petty gains, which might have been achieved incidentally, but which would have retarded the accomplishment of the main object. Clifton was so far inferior in skill to Green as not to know that the most serpentine diplomatists will sometimes assume the virtue they do not possess, and act in a straightforward honest manner when they apprehend the following a sinuous pathway may prevent, and would certainly delay, their arrival at the contemplated goal. And it may be added,

that politicians clever enough to see the wisdom of pursuing such a course occasionally, only want one quality—principle—to follow it at all times.

Clifton woke not only well pleased with herself, but less bellicose than usual in her dispositions towards the rest of the world. She had regained the self-possession that became her, not only as overseer and general superintendent of Mrs. Archibald's household, but as that lady's personal attendant and confidential maid. So having breakfasted with Mary and Dumpling, and served Miss Morton's breakfast in the library, she carried Mrs. Archibald's tray upstairs, and was noways surprised when, after a little while, she heard from her lady that a few strangers were expected in the evening, in addition to the usual visitors, and that refreshments were to be served on trays.

All this Clifton knew was the proper and right thing to do. Clifton had great confidence in her mistress, and felt she would never lower the dignity of the establishment. So Clifton, who was a good cook and confectioner, and altogether an invaluable servant, made all befitting preparations for the evening's entertainment, and whilst whipping eggs and mixing custards fixed in her mind the course

she thought best to pursue in doing what she believed to be furthering the interests of the Archibald family.

By eight o'clock that evening Clifton had seen all the company arrive, with the exception of the gentleman she was most anxious to see. Leaving Mary to answer the drawing-room bell, she took her place at the front garden gate, and, with folded arms rested thereon, looked occasionally in the Kensington direction. She had not been long at her post when a cab drove up. Clifton opened the gate before the driver had time to alight. Mr. Archibald jumped out, gave the man his fare, crossed the garden, and ran up the steps, at the top of which stood Clifton holding the house-door open. In a low tone she requested Mr. Archibald to step into the library. When in that apartment Clifton closed the door carefully.

"I'll not delay you long, Master Richard, but I thought it right to tell you the goings-on here, which is what I don't understand. I know I speak out of my turn, but when I see what I don't understand I think I ought to tell 'em as what can understand."

Mr. Archibald listened attentively, but made no remark. Clifton went on,—

“ ‘Tis Mr. Wynum and his son I don’t

understand. When I see Cornet Wynum come here morning after morning for weeks together, and then all of a sudden drop off, and then come for a little while in the evening, and then stop away entirely ; and when I see Miss Morton dine with 'em four days running—”

“Miss Morton dine with Mr. Wynum ! ” exclaimed Mr. Archibald, vehemently.

“Master Richard, I didn't say that. Miss Morton didn't go to dine with Mr. Wynum, she went to dine with Miss Maunsell ; but 'twas the same thing, you see, Master Richard, for Mr. Wynum and the cornet were there every day.”

The blood rushed to Richard Archibald's face, but he did not speak. Clifton paused and looked rather frightened ; the gentleman motioned her to go on.

“I know, Master Richard,” she said in a subdued tone, “I speak out of my turn ; but, law love us ! to think of Miss Maunsell asking Miss Margaret to dinner—what she never did all these long years ! Why should she do it now ? That's what I say. And then Cornet Wynum to see her home every night to this door and refuse to come in : much as to say, ‘I needn't ; I can see you elsewhere.’ ”

Mr. Archibald struck the table with his clenched hand and stood up.

“ Did my aunt know all this ? ”

“ No, sir. Oh, Master Richard, don’t speak so loud ! ”

Suddenly composing himself, Richard Archibald sat down, and, spite the traces of angry emotion on his face, forced a smile.

“ You know, Clifton, Miss Morton couldn’t help that. She couldn’t refuse to dine with Miss Maunsell. I believe aunt would be afraid to refuse the old lady anything.”

“ I know that, Master Richard. I see things plain enough. I know I speak out of my turn, but this I say, poor Miss Maunsell’s a good soul ; but the old fox winds her round his finger.”

And Clifton illustrated her meaning by extending the index of each hand, and making them perform a rotatory motion round each other.

“ Of course he does it all to please his son,—that’s only nature ; but it don’t suit me, nor it wouldn’t suit your dear uncle. I know I speak out of my turn, but what I can’t understand is Master Harry. When I see him walk up to this door with Cornet Wynum, and wish him good-night, and the other refused to come in, I was confounded ! ”

“ When did this happen ? ”

“Last week, sir. If I’d seen a ghost I couldn’t be more confounded. I know I speak out of my turn, Master Richard ; but I know as what was the intentions of your dear uncle. I see you and Miss Margaret grow up before my eyes and, for that matter, Master Harry, too. I do wonder at him ! ”

Richard Archibald rose from his chair and took a turn through the room. He paused near Clifton, and, putting his hand on her shoulder, said,—

“Clifton, you were a faithful servant to my uncle. I don’t wonder at his setting such a value on you as he did. You have been faithful to me, Clifton, and I never forget a service. I should like to be a few minutes alone.”

“Certainly, sir.”

Clifton opened the library-door, and saw Mary skip lightly towards the top of the kitchen stairs, observing, as she went off, that she fancied she had heard a knock at the house-door.

Richard Archibald wished to remain a few minutes alone in the library before meeting the company assembled in the drawing-room. He wished to recover his composure and fix on a line of conduct. Richard Archibald was not a man of inflammable temper. His passions

were strong, but obedient to his judgment, which was under the strict guidance of his interest and his ambition. When, on a former occasion, his jealousy had been roused against Cornet Wynum, he gave way to a burst of passion which, though it had the effect of astonishing and convincing Henry Morton, did not form by any means a subject of pleasing reflection for himself. And now he had the mortification of finding himself, as he thought, betrayed by Mr. Morton, and, to a certain extent, by his aunt. His aunt ! What could induce her to favour Cornet Wynum ? She was not a woman likely to take pride in seeing her niece married to a man merely because he wore a red coat. His aunt was a woman that loved the luxuries of life, and that would wish to secure them to her niece. Could it be that Cornet Wynum's millionaire uncle was ready to buy his promotion from grade to grade, as fast as the Horse Guards permitted, until he should reach the rank of colonel ? Was that same millionaire uncle willing to make large settlements on the wife of the nephew whom he regarded as his heir ?

To Richard Archibald's logical mind these were weighty considerations. Money, he knew, was a solid advantage, and the wealthy manu-

facturer from the auriferous North could offer advantages that would outweigh in Mrs. Archibald's mind the best prospects of her husband's nephew, whilst Cornet Wynum's personal merits were such as no rival could afford to despise. So whilst the uncle satisfied the ambition of the aunt, the nephew might win the affections of the niece.

As Richard Archibald arrived at this conclusion, a pang sharp as a serpent's fang entered his heart, at the same instant the blood rushed wildly to his head, he made a violent movement with his arm, as though he were cleaving some one to the earth. Quickly restraining himself, he folded his arms across his chest, and made a few turns through the room. Having recovered his self-control, he thought what would be best to do. In the pride of his self-confidence, his first impulse was instantly to face the threatened danger. He would see whether a tradesman's money could outbalance natural affection in his aunt's mind, as well as the known wishes of her husband. He would see whether his cousin's classical training and cultivated intellectual tastes could be bartered for a red coat and a pair of blue eyes.

The article of the red coat he did not much mind; but the blue eyes, and the fond and fer-

vent spirit that beamed through them, were obstacles that could not be over-estimated. To neutralize the recollection of those eyes, Richard Archibald paused before the mirror that ran from the ceiling to the floor, between two of the bookcases. Richard Archibald was a handsome man. He wanted but two inches of being six feet high, his square white forehead, set off by dark-brown hair, bore witness to high intellectual power, and the general mould of the head corresponded in character with the frontal development. His were not blue eyes ; they were deep-set, dark-grey eyes, surrounded with black lashes ; and what with the depth of the setting, and the darkness of the lashes, those eyes were generally reputed black. The nose was good, the mouth well formed, the lips moderately full, and firmly closed, as much from habit, acquired by a close thinker, as from natural formation. The chin was broad and strongly marked ; the ears small. A sculptor might point out defects in Mr. Archibald's face ; the jaw was somewhat heavy, the upper lip somewhat too long. The latter defect might have been concealed by a moustache, but Mr. Archibald did not wear moustaches. He wore glossy black whiskers, that reached from the roots of his hair along

the sides of his face, and showed to advantage the healthy brown of his complexion.

Mr. Archibald experienced no feeling of dissatisfaction as he looked steadily in the mirror. The handwriting of thought working internally had writ a character on the external form. The handsome features had become the index of the mind, and brow and eye and mouth showed distinctly the workings of the informing spirit. Mr. Archibald was some seven or eight years older than Cornet Wynum, but that which twenty years later might have been a disadvantage in such a rivalry as he was about to enter on was in the actual circumstances a gain.

Richard Archibald smiled as he turned from the mirror. The embryo advocate estimated with a foresight that did credit to his legal training the materials at his command. His resources in the conflict in which he was about to engage would be entirely personal, with the exception of the natural predilection which his aunt and cousin might be expected to entertain for him. His great opponent was the banking account of the millionaire.

Having duly considered the pros and cons of the position, Richard Archibald, with a proud self-confidence which in ninety-nine cases out of

a hundred is the key to social success, took the way to his aunt's drawing-room. He experienced a defiant pleasure in the thought that all there were opposed to him; his triumph would be single-handed in making them bow to his will.

Notwithstanding Clifton's intimations, Richard Archibald was surprised at the brilliant appearance of the guests assembled by his aunt. There was Miss Maunsell in the captivating cap, or rather border to the ordinary black background, that she had appeared in at the late state dinner. She was engaged in a *tête-à-tête* with Captain Wilmot. The handsome soldier must have been endowed with great resisting force if he withstood the effects of the beautiful blush rose that bloomed, supported by a charming green spray, above Miss Maunsell's right eye. Then there was the rich brocaded silk dress, worn twice annually during the past seven years, to say nothing of various artifices in ribbon, jewellery, and lace. How Miss Maunsell, who prided herself on her humanity, could level so destructive an array against a fellow-creature was inexplicable. And there was Madame Charleroi, dressed in the perfection of French taste; and there was Mrs. Archibald, whose artistic skill in toilette mysteries

enabled her almost to vie in youthfulness of appearance with the French lady.

Richard, having paid his respects to his aunt, and apologized for being so late, looked round for Margaret. He asked for her, and Mrs. Archibald intimated by a gesture that she was in the other section of the room. At that moment a piano sounded.

“Oh, aunt, you have music to-night.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Archibald, languidly; “I thought it would help to entertain my guests. Sit down, Richard.” And his aunt motioned to a place beside her on the couch.

“Aunt, pray excuse me for a moment. I want to see Margaret. I haven’t seen her these three days.”

Mrs. Archibald bowed and smiled, and her nephew walked to the other end of the room. There he had the pleasure of seeing Miss Keel at the piano, lightly touching the accompaniment of a song which she was teaching Henry Morton to intone. At the other side of the room sat Miss Morton, between Mr. Wynum and his son. The trio were so engrossed, they did not perceive either the entrance or the approach of Mr. Archibald. He stood before them.

“Oh, Richard! how do you do?”

“Margaret, how are you?”

There was a fond familiarity in the tones that fell with a cold, leaden weight on the heart of Cornet Wynum. Richard Archibald did not sit down. He stood behind his cousin’s chair, and rested his hand on the back, whilst he explained why he had not been to Eva Terrace for three days, and why he had not written to her.

“My avocations,” he said, addressing Mr. Wynum, “are indeed severe. They cut me off, for the present, at least, from almost every amusement and relaxation, and from all the home-comforts that I might enjoy here with my aunt and cousin.”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Wynum, slowly. “When a man has a strong motive he’ll find time for everything.”

“You, who have been a student,” said Mr. Archibald, with unruffled blandness, “must know how jealous and imperious is professional study of all kinds, but especially the law.”

“I have studied a little,” said Mr. Wynum, with a rather supercilious air, and leaning back in his chair; “but I always found time to fulfil the duties of society.”

"I have no doubt. But how few possess the versatility of Mr. Wynum!"

"Oh, as to that, I'm not better than other men."

"Margaret," said her cousin, bending over her, "I'm about to enjoy a little relaxation this evening. Will you kindly play the duet with Miss Keel that you played the evening we dined with Mr. Wynum?"

"With pleasure."

Miss Morton rose, and her cousin conducted her to the piano, where, after saluting Miss Keel and Henry Morton, he preferred his request to the former. Miss Keel immediately prepared to comply. Mr. Archibald set a chair for his cousin, took his place behind her, and turned over the leaves of the duet till the performance came to an end. He then said, with a smile,—

"Margaret, I'll be ceremonious, and conduct you to your chaperon, according to ball-room etiquette."

His cousin smiled and took his arm. She understood the jealous feeling that dictated the move, and accepted it as her due homage. Mrs. Archibald was well pleased with her nephew's proceeding, and was still further gratified when, having placed his cousin

beside her aunt, he drew his chair so as to make one side of a square, of which Mrs. Archibald's couch formed another, and Madame Charleroi's easy-chair a third. Mr. Archibald was very loquacious, and entertained the ladies with great vivacity ; and finally Monsieur Claude brought a chair and made the fourth side of the square. It was a pleasant little group, and was not broken till Mrs. Archibald remembered that Madame Charleroi sang charmingly, and requested to hear a French ballad. Monsieur Claude stood near his mother whilst she sang, and her husband listened delighted.

Were Margaret Morton a flirt or a coquette, she might have paraded three brilliant conquests in the eyes of her aunt's guests on that evening ; were she a vulgar-minded husband-hunter, she might have closed her bargain-engagement. But Margaret Morton was none of these. She was a proud, dignified, self-respecting, virgin-minded girl, who received with a queenly, poetic exaltation of sentiment the homage which she believed her woman-right. She enjoyed it after the same fashion that a rose might be supposed to enjoy the wooing of soft zephyrs on a summer's day, a wooing that awakens a

gentle thrill without ruffling a leaf or extracting a sigh.

It was midnight when the company started. All departed pleased, not excepting Richard Archibald. He was quite satisfied with himself. He was satisfied in the first place because he had not given his aunt and Henry Morton the slightest clue that could lead them to suspect either what he had learned from Clifton, or how he felt with regard to her revelations. He was also pleased because he had thrown Mr. Wynum, his son, and all would-be rivals back in confusion by unostentatiously taking possession of the great vantage-ground which the name of cousin gave him with Margaret Morton. As he bade her good-night—and he contrived it should be when those he looked upon as rivals or opponents were within hearing—he said,—

“Margaret, I shall be sure to come tomorrow. I shall bring you some papers to read over. I want to have a long talk with you.”

“Then we may expect you to dinner?”

“Yes, I’ll come to dinner.”

Those for whose admonition this little colloquy was intended, felt its crushing force.

CHAPTER III.

EACH succeeding evening during that week, and for the space of ten days after, did Mr. Wynum and his son punctually attend Mrs. Archibald's evening receptions. So did Mr. Archibald. That gentleman soon felt that he needed all his resources to resist the forces arrayed against him. Though Cornet Wynum was his actual rival, it was with Mr. Wynum he had really to contend. He found himself in the position of a State that has a quarrel with a weak foe, protected by a powerful ally, that ever and ever stands in front to encounter the adversary. It was no slight merit in Richard Archibald that he was equal to crossing swords with so skilled a fencer as Mr. Wynum. The contest was so keen, the thrusts so well parried or so promptly returned by Richard Archibald, that he, in whom pride of intellect was the master passion, would have

taken a pleasure in these contests, were it not that, whilst so engaged, he was obliged to abandon the prize for which he was fighting to the real enemy, who was able to sit quietly by, enjoying the struggle, and admiring the prowess of his fatherly ally. And worse still. Cornet Wynum, Richard Archibald's real enemy in the case, was not only looking on, an uncompromised spectator of the battle that was being fought for him, but he was the while luxuriating in the happiness of Miss Morton's conversation and presence. The patience of the great Idumean might have winced under such circumstances ; and had Richard Archibald a friend to whom he could have unbosomed his griefs, he would probably have exhibited temper : but he was just then in a position congenial to his arrogant and self-reliant nature ; he was at war with all around, and he was resolved, single-handed, to conquer. He certainly placed great trust in Margaret Morton's intellectual predilections ; he knew her ambition pointed to an intellectual career, and he believed that none but a man of large, strong, and cultivated mind could permanently hold her affections. But he knew, too, that women as high-minded as Margaret Morton had lived to regret their wedding-day.

Then there was the influence of her aunt and brother, which was evidently at the command of the great millionaire of the North. And in addition to all these impediments, Richard Archibald could not shut his eyes to the amiable qualities, personal attractions, and dazzling uniform of the young officer, who was besides the undisputed heir to the great Northern magnate. Weighing with a cool judgment the difficulties that lay in his way, the young lawyer resolved to encounter them one by one. Mr. Wynum was, for the moment, the great antagonist. He was like a giant of fairy literature defending an enchanted castle, where a lovely princess lay enthralled by wizard spells, and whom some valiant knight was endeavouring to rescue.

None of the onlookers felt so uncomfortable as Mrs. Archibald in witnessing this prolonged contest, for the simple reason that none other understood so well the character of the combatants. Henry Morton rather enjoyed the fun. He was conscious of an estrangement on Richard Archibald's part within the last few days; for, with all the lawyer's cleverness, he could not prevent the taint in his mind communicating itself in a slight degree to his manner. Henry Morton told his aunt ne did

not see why he should be for ever humouring Richard Archibald, nor did he understand why he should sacrifice an agreeable acquaintance like Cornet Wynum to gratify anybody's jealous whims. As for his sister, she was under no engagement to Richard Archibald.

What Henry Morton said was quite true, but it was unsatisfactory to his aunt. She regarded his remarks as an opening up of old sores. She was wearied by the annoyance of the last few months, and was utterly disinclined to a disputatious conversation; so she resolved to do all she could to assist Richard without affecting to perceive what was going on. She captured Cornet Wynum as soon as possible after his arrival of an evening, invited him to sit beside her, and there held him in honourable captivity, entertaining him and seemingly entertained by him. But this could not endure long. Mrs. Archibald's duties as hostess sometimes turned her attention from her prisoner, who profited by the opportunity, and escaped to submit voluntarily to stronger attractions. Sometimes he owed his liberation to a strategic move of his father; sometimes to a mischievous trick of Henry Morton. The latter was now a decided partisan, and one, too, whose aid was powerful. He would some-

times take a place by his sister, and enter into serious undertoned conversation. Nobody could venture to intrude on the *tête-à-tête* of a brother and sister, who might be talking of family affairs; but Mr. Morton would often call in Cornet Wynum to ask a question about military matters or French literature, on both of which the cornet was considered an authority, and, having made his group triangular, Mr. Morton would loll back in his chair, leaving his sister and Cornet Wynum to defray the expenses of the conversation.

This conduct on the part of Henry Morton was exasperating to Richard Archibald, and confirmed his worst suspicions with regard to the influence of the millionaire.

Mrs. Archibald tried on several occasions to make a diversion in favour of her nephew Richard by engaging Mr. Wynum in her service, but the old campaigner was not to be caught. It was true he accepted with reverential thanks the proffered place beside the lady of the house on her couch, but no sooner was he seated there than he commenced to plan his escape. How skilfully he entrapped Miss Maunsell into being his accomplice! What sighs did the good lady heave, how often did she lift her eyes upwards, and how

often did she cast them downwards, as Mr. Wynum dilated on his coming grief in the approaching parting with his son! And, finally, as if overcome by the sketch he had made, Mr. Wynum would rise abruptly from his seat, leaving Mrs. Archibald and Miss Maunsell to comment on what he had said, whilst he sought a place beside the cornet.

Mrs. Archibald had the good sense to know when she was beaten. She saw it was useless to enter into a personal conflict with Mr. Wynum, so she resolved to appeal to her nephew Richard. His interests were at stake, and she admired the courage with which he was waging the unequal contest. Mr. Wynum had contrived to damage him considerably in the opinion of their little circle. Richard Archibald had hitherto taken a stand upon his professional knowledge, and had assumed a certain importance because of his magazine articles; and though he had not studied at any university, he was undeniably a good Latin scholar and no mean mathematician. But Mr. Wynum took frequent occasion now to express his belief that the object of education should be to fit us for the times in which we live. The great thinkers of modern times —and men were as capable of thinking now as

at any past period of the world—are the exponents of the highest mental condition of the age in which they live; and modern languages are the plastic moulds in which modern thought is cast, the aërial vehicles of a humanizing and universal civilization.

And here Mr. Wynum was able to make great capital out of his son's knowledge of French. A residence of eight years in France when a boy had given Cornet Wynum perfect facility in the use of the language, a knowledge, however, of which he was by no means proud, knowing that his uncle had given him a Continental education in order to fit him for the counting-house.

Sometimes Mr. Wynum, with graceful regret, lamented the erroneous step made in the commencement of his own educational career, when he passed or lost many years at the university—a much larger number than Mr. Archibald had squandered there: the guardians of his education had been more prudent.

This harassing warfare was carried on so noiselessly, so gracefully and politely, that it required as keen an appreciator as himself to estimate correctly the cleanness of the cuts inflicted by Mr. Wynum on his opponent, who, in all but experience, might be adjudged his

equal. Mrs. Archibald was fully able to appreciate the skill displayed on each side; but the more she reflected, the more she became puzzled in trying to know what Mr. Wynum meant. There were moments when she fancied he intended to seek a private interview with Margaret, and plead his son's cause with her; but the suspicion, often as it arose, was rejected. Mr. Wynum, she said to herself, was incapable of acting so dishonourably; yet when he oftentimes, foregoing a disputation with Richard Archibald, took his place beside Margaret Morton, and exerted himself to please, Mrs. Archibald could not help thinking he was striving to gain her niece's confidence, preparatory to making an avowal on behalf of his son; or he might be preparing his way to formally asking her niece's hand from her guardian aunt or brother. This thought really alarmed Mrs. Archibald. The dearest wish of her heart—the only one that could incite her to action—was to see Richard Archibald married to Margaret Morton; but should Mr. Wynum ask her consent to his son's wooing her niece, she should be obliged to refuse, without being able to assign a satisfactory reason. It would be equivalent to insulting Mr. Wynum to refuse his son's alliance, when she could not say her niece was.

engaged ; and engaged she was not. On the other hand, should Mr. Wynum apply to Henry Morton, there was every reason to suppose his offer would be cordially received, and that he would find a strong and active ally in Margaret's brother. Mrs. Archibald saw, and knew her nephew saw, in the background of the young cornet's opening career the vast wealth of his millionaire uncle.

It was surprising how much Mr. Wynum had succeeded in lowering the value of Richard Archibald in the opinion of those about. Even Henry Morton began to think Dick was not so very great a fellow after all. He said something very like this to his aunt and sister as they sat together at meal times. Mrs. Archibald was annoyed, not so much by what was said, as at perceiving the change that had been wrought in Henry's mind.

Mrs. Archibald's perplexity was pitiable. The Belgravian mother, who sees the season drawing to a close without the prospect of getting off hands even one of her many marriageable daughters, could not feel more unhappy than did Mrs. Archibald under the apprehension of an offer of marriage being made to or for her niece.

Amidst all these difficulties, Mrs. Archibald

never entertained the thought of confiding her annoyances to her niece. Faithful to the rule laid down by her deceased husband, that Margaret was never to be taught to think of Richard as her future husband, she forbore to speak either in his favour or against any one whom she believed his rival. And this adherence to principle became another source of embarrassment to Mrs. Archibald. Debarred from speaking to her niece, she watched her conduct closely. The cool judgment and dispassionate candour Margaret displayed in upholding Richard's merits against her brother's disparaging remarks did not betray the sentiments of a woman in love. But, to outweigh this view, Mrs. Archibald knew that the women of her family were quite capable of allowing the fox of intensest feeling to gnaw away their hearts rather than, unwooed, exhibit the slightest external symptoms of affection. Still Mrs. Archibald had too much experience not to be aware that candour is suspicious in such cases. Could it be possible that Margaret had conceived a liking for Cornet Wynum? He was undeniably, as Miss Maunsell was accustomed to say, a charming young man. Apart from every other objection, Mrs. Archibald would have a decided aversion to see her niece marry

a man younger than herself; yet sensible women and sensible girls had contracted such marriages.

Ten days of worry and watchfulness were beginning to tell on Mrs. Archibald. She had come openly and unmistakably to the aid of Richard Archibald, and yet he had not sought her advice nor offered her his confidence. She resolved to seek his.

One night, when Mr. Archibald returned to his chambers, after having dined and passed the evening at Eva Terrace, he found a note. Recognizing the writing of the superscription, he hastily opened the little epistle and read a request from his aunt to call on her the following morning as early as he pleased—before eleven, if he wished. She would see him in her room.

These were words of good omen, and Mr. Archibald felt the strain so tightly kept upon his nerves of late relax as he re-read the few lines. He was at Eva Terrace next morning before eleven, having taken care on his way to avoid Mr. Morton, who would be then on his road to the City. He was admitted by Clifton, who had received instructions from her mistress. Miss Morton was in the library, engaged in her customary morning avocations, but Mr.

Archibald did not enter to wish her good-morning. He went direct to his aunt's dressing-room, where she was waiting to receive him. A long conference of nearly two hours, and Mr. Archibald departed, still without seeing Miss Morton. About nine that evening he entered the drawing-room at Eva Terrace. He apologized for being late. "But," he added, "I've been working hard for the very laudable purpose of enjoying a holiday: in fact, I've compressed two days' work into one. One of my fellow Templars, whose brother is in the army, told me this morning that Cornet Wynum's regiment will probably be ordered to Southampton for embarkation next week. I should like to enjoy a day with you," turning to the cornet, "before then. Will you and your father, and all my gentlemen friends here present, do me the favour of coming to Richmond with me to-morrow?"

Cornet Wynum, his father, and Henry Morton immediately accepted the invitation.

"I shall send a note to ask Monsieur Claude and his father," said Mr. Archibald. "Aunt, you will allow Mary to take it round?"

"Certainly."

"We've all been much together of late, and

we must endeavour to enjoy each other's society whilst we can."

Richard Archibald's unusual frankness of manner and considerate good nature took the company, with one exception, by surprise. Even Mr. Wynum was thrown off his guard; and Miss Maunsell, laying her hand on Mr. Archibald's arm, said she always knew he had a good heart.

"You will have an addition to your party, Richard," said his aunt, "that you didn't calculate on. Mr. Browne is in town, and will be here this evening. I've had a note from him."

"My dear," said Miss Maunsell, "how long you delayed to tell the good tidings!"

"I waited till all should be assembled in conclave. You know I'm economical of my words."

"Well, dear, I suppose you're quite right: I couldn't keep anything so long on my mind."

The party of gentlemen went to Richmond the following day, Mr. Browne being one amongst the number. The account of the day's entertainment, as furnished to Mrs. Archibald by Mr. Morton, was most satisfactory. Her nephew Richard had shown himself a charming host; the wines were of the best quality; everybody was in high good humour,

and foremost amongst the happy was Mr. Wynum.

When Mr. Morton came to this part of his recital, Miss Maunsell heaved a long-drawn and almost hysterical sigh. She wondered at the hardness of men's hearts. She supposed it was all right. Perhaps it was courage, not want of feeling; but how any man could see his own son—and such a beautiful young man—going to a foreign country to be shot, and show no feeling about it, was what she could not comprehend. It was useless to say there was a chance of his not being shot. Miss Maunsell went on dilating on the fatal certainty with which bullets find a hiding-place in the human heart, and the horrible preference they show for beautiful young men; and dilated on the murderous proclivities of those small leaden balls until, to all intents and purposes, Cornet Wynum might be fairly regarded as a man for whom bullets had so strong an affinity—at least, upon Indian soil—that scarcely should he place his foot there when a hissing shower of these murderous pellets would greet his coming. Having thus disposed of the bullet question, and having, in the opinion of her hearers, given the cornet a soldier's grave, Miss Maunsell went on to slay

the slain, and declared she shuddered at the thought of that young man dying of yellow fever, as he was sure to.

To all this Mrs. Archibald listened in silence, so did her niece; but not so did Henry Morton. He assured Miss Maunsell it was much better to be shot on the battle-field than die of consumption at home; that a fellow had as good a chance of not being, as of being, shot; and that for his part he believed it was all the same in the end.

These very pointed and profitable remarks were made during dessert at Mrs. Archibald's, she, her niece, and nephew, and Miss Maunsell being the only persons present. As the ladies were retiring, Mrs. Archibald asked her nephew if she might expect him in the drawing-room.

"Only for a moment, aunt. I've an appointment with old Grant for half-past eight. He's a queer old fellow, and keeps such extraordinary hours. All the others are dining with Mr. Browne: I'll look in on 'em about ten. I shan't return here to-night."

So Henry Morton remained in the dining-room to smoke a cigar, sip a glass of wine, and ponder on the subject of his expected interview with old Grant.

Mrs. Archibald was lying on her couch, and

apparently dozing; Miss Maunsell was ensconced in a very easy chair, not far from her friend, her eyes closed, and from the tone of her breathing and the general composure of her manner seemingly unconscious of external things. Margaret Morton was seated at the further end of the room, reading by the subdued light of a lamp. An unbroken silence prevailed until Clifton brought coffee, when she turned on the gas and induced movement on the part of the eldest ladies.

Miss Maunsell had been some time sipping her coffee, when she said, "How very dull we are!"

"I'm afraid you find it so, Ellen," said Mrs. Archibald.

"My dear," said Miss Maunsell, hastily, "I only spoke on your account. You've been so gay of late, I thought you might feel the change."

"I enjoy quiet. 'Tis the only condition I do enjoy." And Mrs. Archibald spoke feebly.

"Yes, dear. That was always your disposition. I was once lively; but the cares and troubles of life have completely damped my spirits."

Here the speaker fetched a sigh as dolorous

and prolonged as though she had recently buried a husband and ten children.

Half an hour passed. Clifton and her coffee tackle had disappeared ; Miss Maunsell was knitting, and Margaret Morton was still reading. Mrs. Archibald, changing her recumbent attitude, sat upright and proposed a game of cribbage. Miss Maunsell assented, and became quite vivacious when she won the deal. Great was her hilarity when she scored two for his heels, and luck, having smiled on her *début* in the game, seemed inclined to accompany her throughout. In one hand she counted twenty-four, and, before her adversary had turned the corner, had won the game. Mrs. Archibald playfully exclaimed at her friend's good fortune ; and Miss Maunsell, who was always moderate when victorious, tried to temper her opponent's disappointment by saying such a chance was extraordinary and might not occur again for a year. The cards were again shuffled and dealt, and Fortune showed herself less one-sided. In an interval between the deals, Miss Maunsell commented on the superiority of whist over cribbage, and lamented the absence of the customary partners.

“I must say, Mr. Browne is showing a great deal of good feeling towards Mr. Wynum.

Poor man ! he 'll soon be without a son, and just after having found him. 'Tis very considerate of Mr. Browne and your nephews to give him entertainments ; but it seems to me rather odd Mr. Wynum does not make a return at his own house. But I dare say he will. Don't you think so, dear ? ”

“ Oh, Ellen ! ” and Mrs. Archibald seemed startled. “ I beg you not to hint at such a thing.”

“ I hint, dear ? What do you take me for ? ”

“ I beg your pardon, Ellen, I really beg your pardon ; but the apprehension of more dinner-parties terrifies me. I 've gone through more fatigue the last six months than during the previous six years. I 'm not equal to it ; indeed I 'm not.”

“ My dear creature, don't alarm yourself. I don't know any one likely to invite you or me to a dinner-party ; though I must say you seemed much better for the change, when you did go out of late.”

Miss Maunsell looked grave and rather offended.

“ Nobody was fonder of society than I was once,” quietly remarked Mrs. Archibald ; “ but I feel I 'm now unequal to such efforts.”

“ My dear, you give yourself up too much

to gloomy thoughts ; you do indeed. But you needn't be alarmed as to dinner-parties : I don't think you and I are likely to get many such invitations."

" For my part, I confess I hope not."

A fortnight passed, and Mr. Wynum's gentlemen friends seemed still determined to make the last days of his son's stay in England as merry as may be. Conspicuous amongst the dispensers of hospitality was Mr. Browne. He wished Cornet Wynum to see all that was within his reach before he should bid adieu to England. Sometimes he took him and his friends twenty miles out of town, that the young soldier might see the rural surroundings of the great metropolis. Sometimes he took the party up the river; sometimes he took them down. Nor were the other gentlemen idle. Monsieur Claude, Mr. Morton, and Mr. Archibald frequently assumed the position of host. But whenever there was a pause in the invitations, or the probability of an idle day, Mr. Browne stepped in and proposed a pleasure trip. He would not be refused. He seldom tried to amuse,—he said it was not his *forte*; but he was determined to show Cornet Wynum something of London life before he embarked. Cornet Wynum could

not feel otherwise than grateful, and his father was delighted. Mr. Wynum enjoyed the small eddy of dissipation into which he had unexpectedly drifted; it reminded him of olden times, and of the expenses in which he was once able to indulge, but which, for reasons known only to himself, he had within the last few years been obliged to curtail. Besides, Mr. Wynum said, in the recesses of his own heart, that in a social sense—and he was strict in such reckonings—these gentlemen were only making returns for his and his son's hospitality, with the exception of Mr. Browne, who happened to be out of town when high festivities were being held at Kensington; but then Browne was a very old friend, and might be supposed to look on his friend's son with a kind of paternal feeling.

The facilities for amusing his friends offered at this special crisis to Mr. Browne were marvellous. It would seem as though the managers of all the theatres in London had combined to put boxes and pit-stalls at his disposal. Had he been a successful dramatic author, of ubiquitous talents, his claims upon managers and lessees could not have been more readily acknowledged, nor his presence in their establishments more warmly desired.

From the older, the time-honoured, the aristocratic fanes where the classical drama is professedly upheld, from those palatial structures where the operatic works of the great magicians of sound are reproduced, down to the modern erections where grinning mirth, plus vulgarity and minus humour, misleads the taste of the rising generation, upon every step of this long ladder, whose head is topped by the sun-lighted clouds of genius and whose base is plunged in the mire,—with the proprietors of all these widely diversified haunts of pleasure Mr. Browne seemed to be on terms of hand-and-glove intimacy. It was no compliment, he told his friends, to accept these invitations; it was doing him a favour, because it enabled him to gratify his friends, the managers, all of whom were delighted to see him.

Whilst the gentlemen of Mrs. Archibald's immediate circle were amusing themselves at this rapid pace, she, her niece, and Miss Maunsell might have been left in profound ignorance of what was going on but for Henry Morton, who wrote occasionally to his aunt and sister. He had not slept at Eva Terrace for nearly ten days, and explained his absence by saying he must either renounce business or

offend Mr. Browne, who seemed possessed by a demon of dissipation. He did not know what was the matter. Dick, too, was become flighty, and left him to manage old Grant and the office, where the aforesaid Dick never put his foot except on the days when the mails arrived from India. In fact, Dick overloaded him with business, and Mr. Browne overtaxed him with pleasure. How his constitution was to stand it was a mystery time only could solve.

Henry Morton's notes were read aloud by his aunt and sister for Miss Maunsell, who was affectionately mentioned in them; they always created much merriment. Margaret Morton sometimes received a note from Richard Archibald. It was about proofs she was to get from the printers, and about a manuscript that he would send her. Richard Archibald's notes were too prosaic to interest any one but the person to whom they were addressed, so Margaret Morton contented herself with giving her aunt the message intended for her, and Mrs. Archibald asked no questions.

Was this all the information Mrs. Archibald had relative to the doings of the gentlemen in question? Clifton thought not. Almost every morning two notes were left by the postman

for Mrs. Archibald ; and on the afternoons of such days Clifton was sent by her mistress to post two letters, addressed to gentlemen whom the faithful handmaid suspected of being the authors of the epistles that had arrived in the morning.

The fortnight of dissipation had just come to an end, when a rumour obtained that Cornet Wynum's regiment was to be kept at home, and his own leave of absence extended. This intelligence brought Mr. Browne's festivities to a sudden close, for neither he nor Richard Archibald could allege a reason for giving farewell parties to a man who was not going away ; and his friends, the managers, seemed suddenly to have forgotten Mr. Browne's existence.

Things being thus thrown back into *statu quo*, whist-parties and evening assemblies were formed, as of old, at Mrs. Archibald's. Thither came punctually the ancient *habitués* and the modern *invités*. Mrs. Archibald resumed the old line of policy, but with less confidence than before, now that the future looked so hazy. To counterbalance the uncertainty that made her present trouble, she was able to reckon on two docile and effective allies. Richard Archibald implicitly obeyed his aunt's directions ;

Mr. Browne was as her right hand that moved obedient to her will. Richard Archibald, now following private instructions, shunned single-combat discussions with Mr. Wynum, and divided his time between his aunt, Miss Maunsell, and his cousin Miss Morton, giving the latter, however, the larger portion. Mrs. Archibald indulged her lately acquired predilection for Cornet Wynum's company, and tried to keep him beside her during the evening. These arrangements, admirably well devised, would easily have attained their object, were they not on every side met by a resisting medium, delicate as the ether through which the outermost planet of our system makes its way, and yet which, fine as it is, retards the journey of the wandering star.

The resisting medium in the social system of which Mrs. Archibald was the centre found its expression in Mr. Wynum's tact. As surely as Mrs. Archibald planned, so surely did Mr. Wynum oppose, and that so delicately that it required perception as refined as his opponent's to detect his manœuvres. In vain did Mrs. Archibald capture Cornet Wynum; his father set him free—free to take his place beside Miss Morton, and if he did not speak—for his was a silent love—at least to listen to her speaking.

This was happiness for Cornet Wynum, even when the beloved spoke to others. In vain did Richard Archibald and Mr. Browne sit down before the Maiden Morton citadel and try to invest it ; an enemy in the rear obliged them to raise the siege and turn to fight. Then came disaster upon them, for they were no match for Mr. Wynum. To do Mr. Browne justice, it must be said he shunned fight and fled. And the defeat of the one and the flight of the other took place before the eyes of the queen of the lists, and the conqueror contrived in some way to shift the victory from himself to his son, by explaining what hereditary talent could do, if only youth and bashfulness would allow it to come forth.

Mrs. Archibald's position was becoming intolerable. In vain did she try to dilute the strong spirits in her social crucible by the admixture of more watery essences ; in vain did she bring Miss Keel and Monsieur Claude to her aid ; in vain did she endeavour by encouraging music—for which she did not care a whit—to offer a diversion to her enemy. Vain attempt ! From every new element introduced Mr. Wynum knew how to evoke a spirit that would do his bidding. In short, do what she may, she had the mortification to

see Mr. Wynum always remain master of the position.

It would have been very easy for Mrs. Archibald to talk with her niece, and explain her wishes, and dilate on family affairs. No doubt it would ; but such a course would have been opposed, not alone to her own feelings, but to the principles laid down by her late husband, whom, now that he was in his grave, she seemed to make more than ever her rule and guide.

And how did Cornet Wynum feel ? Did his soldier spirit despond because he was forbidden to seek glory and defy death on Indian battle-plains ? We must, in historic truthfulness, declare that such was not the case. He believed his red coat and gold lace would show to more advantage in a vapoury English atmosphere than under a glaring Asiatic sun. Besides, he was his uncle's heir ; and as Miss Morton had no money, it would be necessary he should provide some, were he ever—ever—ever—to call her wife. So the simple-minded cornet, who had arrived in London with no more selfish feeling in his breast than intense filial affection, and no stronger passion than the instinct of youth that seeks the unknown, was now beginning to recognize the import-

ance of money in the great social combat. And thus one passion called forth another ; and, in addition, Cornet Wynum felt that next to Miss Morton—next only to her—he idolized his father. What a wonderful man he was ! What talents, what knowledge of the world, he possessed ! How easily he was able to mould people to his will ! How women must have loved—have idolized *him* in his youth !

And then poor Charlie thought of his mother ; and his heart softened, and his eyes grew moist.

Just then a new rumour sprang up. Mrs. Archibald learned it from a morning paper, which gave it as an *on dit* in military high places that the 1000th Regiment was to be sent at once to India. As the 1000th Regiment was that to which Cornet Wynum belonged, it was only reasonable to suppose that if the regiment went he would go too. How could he leave his father ? He asked his parent the question, and that gentleman—who put as much faith in newspaper *on dits* as he did in Miss Maunsell's wig, believing them alike rootless—quietly remarked there had been no official notification of the movement, and that it was so far valueless. To do Mr. Wynum justice, it must be said he was very proud of his son,

and had acquired a strong affection for him, the one sentiment nourishing the other. He could not, therefore, without pain look upon the possibility of a separation ; but it was a maxim in Mr. Wynum's philosophy not to go half way to meet sorrow ; so, confiding in the vacillation of our military administration, he declined to sorrow without official authority.

It would seem that Mr. Wynum was not wrong in his calculations, for an evening paper, semi-demi official, and an oracle on military affairs, flatly contradicted, within twenty-four hours, the assertion of the morning journal with regard to the rumoured movement of the 1000th Regiment. The semi-demi not only contradicted its "well-known contemporary," but sneered at the idea of such information coming from high military places.

About this time, Mrs. Archibald began to exhibit an interest in politics which might almost be declared foreign to her nature. She not only read "Military Intelligence" as published in newspapers, but sought out, as far as her languid temperament would permit, information about England's foreign policy. She gave it soon as her opinion that the existing Government was wofully neglectful of our

Indian possessions, which she feared would soon fall into the hands of other Powers.

Mrs. Archibald was giving vent to her alarm about the threatened invasion of our Indian possessions, when she was interrupted by Miss Maunsell. That lady had a grievance. She felt she had been of late overlooked, and, as one may say, neglected, and had consequently concocted a little plot, and began to exhibit a considerable share of temper. A game of whist, she remarked, had not been played in that house for weeks. She did not speak on her own account. For her part she was quite satisfied to sit silent. She need not be unoccupied, she had her knitting, she was never idle, so it was plain she did not speak from any selfish motive, but she did think, when gentlemen who were fond of a rubber of whist came to a house where they were once in the habit of enjoying it, she did think—of course she might be mistaken—but she did think it would only be considerate to indulge them.

This manifestation of temper startled Mrs. Archibald. Everybody knows that in a large family the most irrational member, if endowed with a bad temper, is sure to attain a certain ruling power, not through any misconception on the part of the others as to capacity, but

through love of peace ; so now Mrs. Archibald, who had steadily encountered Mr. Wynum, immediately gave in to Miss Maunsell.

“ My dear Ellen, you’re quite right. We have neglected our whist terribly of late. Mr. Wynum ”—speaking across to that gentleman, who was at a little distance—“ what do you say to a game of whist ? We shall, I fear, forget the science, if we give up the practice. Cornet Wynum, may I engage you for a partner ? ”

The cornet had been enduring martyrdom for the past half-hour beside Mrs. Archibald. He said something about his ignorance of the game, but the excuse would not be accepted ; Mrs. Archibald would have much pleasure in teaching him. The affair seemed to be settled, till, as Mr. Wynum drew near to take his place, he suddenly stopped short,—

“ What, Charlie, you and I engross the whist table ! That would be too much. I know Browne would like to play.”

And walking across the room, he took Mr. Browne by the arm, and marched him towards the whist table. Mr. Browne, believing he was summoned by the lady of the house, offered no resistance. When he perceived the real state of the case, he would fain have with-

drawn ; but it was too late. Mr. Wynum would not hear of such a thing ; Browne must play his rubber. Did he not wish to play, he would not have come forward. This was a strong point. Mr. Browne did not know what to reply.

“ Surely Mr. Wynum,” said Mrs. Archibald, with her sweetest smile, “ you will not give up Miss Maunsell, and ”—she added gaily—“ I cannot resign Cornet Wynum.”

“ I should be very sorry to resign Miss Maunsell,” said Mr. Wynum, with a look of profound deference, “ but I fear to be considered an intruder.”

“ Oh, by no means, sir ! ” said Miss Maunsell, rising suddenly, and looking highly dignified and very angry, “ ’tis I’m the intruder. As you don’t like to resign Cornet Wynum, dear”—turning to Mrs. Archibald, her anger noways abated, spite of the “ dear ”—“ I shall retire. You can play with the three gentlemen ; that will be more agreeable.”

Miss Maunsell moved away from the table. This was too much. Mrs. Archibald would have fearlessly encountered Mr. Wynum’s tact, and tried her skill in opposition ; but her friend Ellen’s temper was another kind of metal, blunt and heavy, and not to be trifled with.

Mrs. Archibald laid her hand on Miss Maunsell's stout arm, and said very softly, looking at Mr. Wynum,—

“I'll give the world an example of self-sacrifice. I resign Cornet Wynum.”

The resigned gentleman looked as though the loss sat lightly on him, as he made a graceful retreat. Mrs. Archibald was discomfited, for though she held Mr. Wynum captive, his son was free, and Mr. Browne was off duty. Mr. Wynum, before taking his seat at the card table, conducted Miss Keel to the piano, wishing, as he explained to Miss Maunsell, that others should find amusement as well as himself. Miss Maunsell, who had just carried her point, commented with a certain asperity of tone on the fewness of those who thought of anybody's enjoyment but their own.

The whist party got on very pleasantly. Mrs. Archibald, relieved from the terror of a demonstration of ill-temper on the part of her friend Ellen, was obliged to accept the lesser evil, and abandon the supervision of her nephew's interests for the moment. Miss Maunsell, who always asserted the necessity of exclusiveness at a whist table, enjoyed again her olden pleasures, and became a centre of masculine attentions.

The musical party at the other side of the drawing-room got on very well. Miss Keel and Miss Morton played a duet; after which Miss Keel played a solo, and then played accompaniments for Mr. Morton and Cornet Wynum. Richard Archibald was no musician, nor did he care for music; so when the entertainments took a musical turn, he was, so to speak, thrown out. But he was not a man to be easily set at a disadvantage. If he could not engross Miss Morton's conversation—which was impossible because of her duties at the piano, turning the leaves for Miss Keel—at least he made all whom it concerned feel, when he did address her, that he had rights in that quarter which were not to be interfered with. Cornet Wynum was not discontented. He saw that when he sang Miss Morton listened; and when he had an opportunity of speaking with her, she seemed as well pleased as when conversing with her cousin. Consequently, between the rivals on that evening it was a drawn battle. Each was satisfied. Each could say that, if he had not gained much, he had not lost anything; and there was a general semblance of honourable peace. All the party, with the exception of Mrs. Archibald, seemed contented. For once—perhaps the first time

in her life—she was not able to control her vexation, but it exhibited itself in a guise which, in a person of less languid temperament, might be deemed a manifestation of interest.

When Clifton had brought in a tray with cake, wine, and sandwiches, and whilst the company were partaking of these refreshments, Mrs. Archibald, taking advantage of some remarks made by Miss Maunsell as to the “blessing” of Cornet Wynum’s regiment not being sent away, said,—

“ Does it not seem to you, Mr. Wynum, that our Indian possessions, of which we once thought so much, no longer excite the same amount of interest ? ”

“ I don’t perceive it,” said Mr. Wynum.

“ I think it very plain. There was a time when the greater portion of our army was sent to India.”

“ Yes,” put in Miss Maunsell, “ to die there.”

“ As to that, Ellen, soldiers must always be ready to die for their country ; and what would England be without India ? ”

“ I’ve often heard my dear uncle say, England’s colonial territories were phantom possessions—these were his very words, ‘ phantom possessions ’—and that it would be

much better for England to give them up, disband her army, relieve the tax-payers, and attend to her own people at home."

"But, Miss Maunsell," said Mr. Wynum, with an amused and compassionate smile, "do you set no value on the glory of your native country?"

"Sir, I do not value glory that is purchased by bloodshed abroad and by oppressive taxation at home."

"Oh, Ellen! Ellen!" said Mrs. Archibald, "your Quaker blood is showing itself now."

"Yes," answered Miss Maunsell, red and indignant; "and my trader's blood, too, if you will. But I consider an honest tradesman a greater credit to his country than the colonel of a regiment who takes pay for slaughtering poor Hindoos."

Here Miss Maunsell leaned back in her chair, looking not only offended, but excited. Her uncle had been engaged in commerce, and was member of a Quaker family, and Miss Maunsell took Mrs. Archibald's remarks as a slight.

Mrs. Archibald felt quite nervous. Mr. Wynum came to her aid. To change the conversation would be rude; to remain silent would indicate bad feeling: he tried to soothe.

“And pray, Miss Maunsell,” he said, with deferential look and bearing, “what would be your theory with regard to our Indian possessions?”

“Sir,” said the lady, proudly, “I’ve no theory on the subject. I’m not competent, as every one here knows”—this with a great accession of wrath—“to form an opinion on such matters; but I have it from those who were competent, and who studied the subject for years.”

“And what did they advise, Miss Maunsell?” inquired Mr. Wynam, with a look of quiet deference.

“Well, sir, my uncle and his friends—he had many friends, and most respectable friends—always said that if England gave up her colonial possessions she would gain more by honest trading with the natives than she ever will by trying to crush ‘em, and at less expense too. That was my dear uncle’s opinion, and the opinion of his friends too.”

“I fully agree with your uncle, Miss Maunsell,” said Mr. Browne; “and even if England did not gain by the change, still I could not sanction bloodshed.”

“Oh, sir, you have the spirit of a trader,

and so have I. There are persons who love bloodshed and despise trade."

"I really do not think, Ellen," said Mrs. Archibald, "that anybody here is in a position to despise trade."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Browne. "I've always said there are only two ways of getting money—work and robbery."

"Which way do you follow, Browne?" said Mr. Wynum.

"Neither; and therefore I get no money. I cannot forget my father was in trade, and, if I had a bit of brains, I'd have followed in the same path; but I had not,—no, indeed, Miss Maunsell, I had not."

The latter part of this little speech was addressed to Miss Maunsell, who had opened her eyes wide, and seemed inclined to laugh at what preceded.

"Come," said Mr. Browne, "I drink to the commerce of England."

The ladies' glasses were filled, and the toast was drunk.

"Miss Maunsell," said Mr. Wynum, with a look of sentimentality, "I know your kind and tender heart will appreciate my feelings as a father, when I say the military glory of England has now acquired an interest in my eyes

greater than I ever felt before. My son is a soldier, and in daily expectation of being ordered to India."

"My dear sir, I thought that point was settled, and that your son would remain at home."

"Nothing seems settled; everything seems unfixed. I know, Miss Maunsell, you can sympathize with any one placed as I am."

"I hope I can, sir; I hope I can. India is a fearful place; my dear uncle always said so. It takes off all our young men, and kills 'em. My dear uncle always said"—this with much emphasis—"commerce is the great civilizer, next to Christianity, and war is one of the greatest curses of humanity."

"A very good sentiment," said Mr. Browne. "I ought to know it well: it was printed and pinned over the mantel-piece in our breakfast-parlour."

Miss Maunsell looked as though she had pinned her adversary. She was still in a dignified but not angry mood. Mr. Wynum had only half succeeded in his attempt to soothe her; so, being suddenly struck by a melody Miss Keel was running over on the piano, he rose and softly entered the other department of the drawing-room, where Miss

Morton was sitting on a couch in conversation with Mr. Archibald, and where, at a short distance from the same couch, Cornet Wynum and Henry Morton were sometimes chatting, sometimes giving ear to the music.

Mr. Wynum was the first to discover it was eleven o'clock—a discovery which as usual caused much astonishment to some of the company, Miss Maunsell amongst the rest. However, that good lady and Miss Keel were soon equipped for their homeward journey, and Mrs. Archibald parted from her friend Ellen on terms of the tenderest friendship.

Whilst arrangements were being made for the safe convoy of the two ladies to their respective homes, Mr. Browne suddenly be-thought himself of a note he wished to write, and which he could post on his way home. Clifton fetched writing materials; and many “good nights” having been exchanged on all sides, Miss Maunsell took her departure under the protection of Mr. Morton and Mr. Archibald, followed as usual by Mrs. Green. Mr. Wynum, not being allowed to enter his own domicile in company with Miss Maunsell, converted himself and his son into a guard of honour to Miss Keel, who had accepted Monsieur Claude’s arm and refused Mr.

Wynum's; and this she did in considerate kindness, not wishing to separate the father and son.

Mrs. Archibald and Mr. Browne were left together in the drawing-room. Mrs. Archibald rose from her couch, walked to the table where Mr. Browne was writing, and, throwing herself into an easy-chair, sighed profoundly, with closed eyes. Mr. Browne threw down his pen.

"You're worried," he said, looking at her.

"Yes, beyond further endurance. Averse as I am to change of all kinds, and unequal as I know I am to exertion, I have made up my mind to leave London and go to the country for three months, and take Margaret."

"Impossible, madam. You wouldn't leave your own home at this season. I'm sure you'd be miserable."

"Am I not miserable here?" And Mrs. Archibald smiled,—"Miserable is a strong term; but I'm really worried—worried and wearied to an extent I can no longer bear. I have explained everything to you. You know, you always knew, the exact circumstances of the family."

"Yes; I know you and poor Archibald always intended, or, at least, strongly desired,

that Richard and Margaret should be married."

"Yes, provided their own inclinations carried them that way."

"I don't see how it can be otherwise. They have been brought up together, trained on the same plan; their tastes are alike. Margaret is scarcely acquainted with any other young man; and if Richard meets a thousand young ladies, he'll never see one superior to Margaret,—indeed I don't think he'll ever see her equal."

"Yes," said Mrs. Archibald, thoughtfully, "Margaret has never had young men acquaintances: until this year she knew none but Richard and Henry. She has been brought up in a very retired way. She was educated almost exclusively by her uncle. He always said he'd strengthen her mind so as to place her above the weaknesses of her sex. He may have been right; I'm sure he was," said Mrs. Archibald, hastily correcting herself; "but, the directions he laid down for my conduct towards Margaret in reference to certain points place me now in great difficulty."

"Where's the special difficulty?"

"I don't understand Mr. Wynum's conduct. As I told you in my letters, and as you see yourself, 'tis inexplicable."

" You think he wishes his son to marry Margaret?"

" It looks like it. And I must say, knowing my wishes and those of her uncle, 'tis scarcely honourable of Mr. Wynum to try to upset our plans."

" Well, as to that, I can't say 'tis dishonourable. Margaret and Richard are not engaged; we all know that. And, after all, what objection is there to Cornet Wynum? He's a very nice young fellow."

" Undoubtedly. I admire him and acknowledge his merit; but he wouldn't be a suitable match for Margaret. You know how money matters stand in our family."

" Yes: the men have it all. Still, Mrs. Archibald—and I assure you I've thought the matter over since you wrote to me—I don't see that money need stand in the way. Young Wynum is heir to his uncle, who is more than a millionaire. I can't see anything dishonourable in his father's proceedings. He knows Margaret has no money; he knows his son will be a rich man; so that, as the case stands, I should say he's acting generously, as far as money is concerned. He sees his son is in love with your niece, and no wonder; and the father does all he can to promote his son's suit."

"But I don't wish such a match for Margaret. 'Twould be entirely opposed to my plans, to the plans of my dear husband; in fact, I cannot sanction it. Besides, Cornet Wynum is younger than Margaret."

"That I think nothing of."

"I must say I think a great deal of it."

"There's one point to be thought of: what are Margaret's own feelings? Have you spoken to her?"

"My dear Mr. Browne, don't you remember my difficulty? I cannot speak to Margaret. I cannot ask my niece to preserve her affections untouched until her cousin is in a position to make her an offer of marriage. I wouldn't degrade my niece to such a point. Were I capable of doing so, I'd expect my husband to rise from his grave and reproach me."

"Then the case stands thus. You wish to see Richard married to Margaret. You know nothing of her feelings on the subject: are you sure of his?"

"Quite so."

"He has spoken to you?"

"Yes. In fact, we've had some painful scenes: I shrink at the thought of another."

"I'm glad to hear it in one sense, though I'm sorry you've had annoyance. But I

always thought Richard wonderfully indifferent about Margaret: I fancied he was too sure of the prize."

"There's where poor Richard is placed in a false position. His love for Margaret is profound, unchangeable. You know what a lofty and firm character is his. I cannot tell you how I admire his self-control in her presence; but his anger was alarming, his jealousy terrific, when he saw a rival, because he's obliged to submit to the laws laid down for him, and he dare not speak to Margaret on the subject that I believe is nearest his heart."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Browne, rubbing his hands, "bravo! I begin to like Dick. Don't look surprised. I didn't like him. I thought he didn't appreciate Margaret. I couldn't forgive any man that."

"He does appreciate her," said Mrs. Archibald, with a smile. "But now you understand my position. I can't speak to Margaret, and I dread speaking with Richard; so I resolved upon leaving town."

"A desperate resolution. But why taken now?" and Mr. Browne looked thoughtful.

"The reason is plain. As long as there was a probability of Cornet Wynum's leaving, I was satisfied to bear a temporary annoyance;

but now that he's likely to remain in England, I couldn't, in justice to myself, in justice to Margaret, in justice to my husband's memory, allow things to go on as they are."

"What you say is reasonable." After a short pause, Mr. Browne added: "I *do* feel for young Wynum. He's an excellent young man, and adores Margaret, I think."

"He is indeed an excellent young man, and his father has reason to be proud of him. But even in justice to Cornet Wynum I ought not to allow things to stay as they are."

"Poor young Wynum! He'll never recover it, I think. He has great feeling."

"Then the sooner we bring matters to a close the better."

CHAPTER IV.

CORNET WYNUM, on returning to his hotel one evening, found there an official document informing him that his regiment was under orders to embark for India. On the following morning he laid the document before his father. It was with a pang—the first of the kind he had ever known—that Mr. Wynum heard of the order for his son's departure. He read the official letter carefully, noted every word, commented on every phrase, and by the time this process was completed, and the document scanned over to the foot of the page, Mr. Wynum had recovered himself.

“Well, Charlie, my boy, 'tis what we've been looking forward to. We've been expecting these orders for some time.”

“Yes, father.”

“Of course you naturally feel leaving England, leaving your family; you feel leaving me.”

“Very much, father.”

"Well, my boy, I feel at losing you. But I mustn't say losing. 'Tis only a separation—a short separation. Charlie, you 'll return colonel of a regiment, my boy. You can buy the rank."

And Mr. Wynum smiled proudly in his faith in the power of money.

Cornet Wynum further informed his father that his aunt and cousins had that morning arrived at the Bath Hotel. Mr. Wynum, knowing his sister-in-law's influence to be all-powerful with her husband, lost not a moment in preparing to pay her his respects. On his way down stairs, he called on Miss Maunsell to tell her of the new arrivals, having previously written a note to Mrs. Archibald containing the same intelligence. Within four-and-twenty hours Miss Maunsell called at the Bath Hotel. She was accompanied by Miss Morton, the latter being the bearer of an invitation to Mr. Wynum and her nieces. Mrs. Archibald hoped the ladies would waive ceremony and dine with her next day. The invitation was accepted; and Miss Maunsell and Miss Morton, having remained to lunch at the hotel, made to Mrs. Archibald, on their return home, a favourable report as to the appearance and manners of the Northern ladies.

Mrs. Archibald profiting by her position of invalid, which had of late been brought so prominently forward, resolved to shift from her own shoulders the burden of doing the honours of her house on the occasion of the coming dinner in honour of Mrs. Wynum. Miss Maunsell was to be her delegate. More than one advantage would result from this move. In the first place, it put the lady-deputy in the best possible humour; and in the next, by placing Mrs. Archibald in a subordinate position, it afforded opportunities of averting or upsetting complications such as, during the last few months, had so much annoyed her, and which she now took fresh courage to encounter, convinced they must soon altogether cease.

It was not without many protestations of incapacity, and many declarations of unfitness, interlarded with innumerable “Now, dears,” that Miss Maunsell consented to accept the honour thus offered. Having at length yielded, she observed, with a whimsical smile, that her friend would gain one advantage by the comparisons that would be made between her and her deputy.

The point was carried. Miss Maunsell was mistress of the feast, and about half-past five on

the following day began to enter on her duties. The dinner went off delightfully, and when the ladies assembled in the drawing-room Mrs. Archibald pressed her friend Ellen's hand and thanked her warmly.

At an early hour the gentlemen joined the ladies. Henry Morton, who did the honours for his aunt's gentlemen guests, was not sorry when Mr. Wynum proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room. Mr. Morton was anxious to cultivate the acquaintance of the Misses Hillston.

Coffee having been discussed, the real festivities of the evening seemed to commence for the young people. There was music, and there was singing and much merry conversation. Cornets Rogers and Staunton, who had been invited to dinner, but who could not come, now appeared with Captain Wilmot. Richard Archibald was no favourer of these red-coated guests; but, as his aunt explained to him, the military chapter of their experiences was drawing to a close, and it was best to finish with a good grace. So Richard, who was fond of addressing society in general, was set upon closer duty with regard to his cousin Margaret.

The presence of Nelly and Matty Hillston,

gave the evening a zest for Henry Morton that his aunt's entertainments did not usually afford. They were two charming little girls, specimens of the fairest and purest English beauty, innocent as they were lovely. Nelly was very fair, her form round and plump, her cheeks coloured with the clearest pink. Her hair was a dark rich auburn, closely waved, and would have fallen in heavy natural ringlets on her neck, were it not fastened at the back of her head, and folded in circular braids. Her eyes were almond-shaped, and brown and lustrous, and shaded by thick black lashes.

To predict what Nelly Hillston would become in womanhood, you need only look at her aunt. Mrs. Wynum was a splendid specimen of an English matron—one of those women that our humid atmosphere preserves in perennial dewy freshness, and who, long after they have counted forty summers, present a development of figure at once richly soft and firmly round—women who tempt us to declare that English matrons are even more lovely than English maidens.

Mrs. Archibald gracefully remarked that Mrs. Wynum and her niece Nelly were like the full-blown rose and half-opened bud blooming on the same tree.

And what was Matty Hillston like? No one object that we know of in nature would furnish an adequate simile. Her eyes were of the violet's deepest hue, with lashes long and black as her sister's. Her face was longer and the colour on her cheek not so distinct as Nelly's. When fixed it was like the leaf of a delicate damask rose; but the colour was changeful in hue, and varied obedient to the current of thought that flowed beneath, and which sometimes lighted up the eyes, sometimes caused the lids to fall musingly, and sometimes dimpled the mouth with a smile of childish, waggish mirth. Matty had celebrated her sixteenth birthday, and was two years younger than her sister.

Mr. Morton, on his arrival in the drawing-room, set about entertaining Nelly Hillston, and, as he had some experience in such exercises, met with his accustomed success; but after a while Nelly became uncomfortable, and looked frequently towards her sister, whom Miss Morton and Monsieur Claude were entertaining; Matty looking infinitely delighted, and often laughing in unrestrained vivacity. Even Richard Archibald, who formed one of the group, was carried away by the mirth, and occasionally threw in a mite of wit.

Henry Morton good naturedly proposed to Nelly to join the party and see what the fun was about. They were well received, and had scarcely seated themselves when Cornet Wynum deployed from the window recess and took his place near his cousin Nelly. What a fluttering this new-comer raised in her little heart ! She had known all along he was standing within the shadow of the window-curtain ; but though he now made a claim out of their common relationship to join the group where Nelly was sitting, she understood what attraction he obeyed in coming.

Miss Morton was fascinated by Matty, and determined the little girl should enjoy herself. Under the influence of this feeling, Margaret became so gay, so witty, so child-like and mirthful, that all about her caught the spirit of her mood, and each became happy by the mere exertion of trying to make others so.

All were happy in that group for the moment, with one exception. Miss Morton made several efforts to inoculate Nelly Hillston with the hilarity she had diffused amongst the rest of her circle, but in vain. Nelly smiled, but her smile was sad ; and when Miss Morton redoubled her attentions, Nelly became timid

and even agitated. Her eyes looked brighter and larger than ordinary, but the increased size and brightness were owing to suppressed tears ; and the white on her cheek gradually encroached on the pink, which it streaked and spotted ; and Nelly was very sad, and none around understood her. Miss Morton finished by thinking her a dull, pretty little girl, not half as pleasant as Matty, who was a dear little creature. Cornet Wynum did not think about her at all, and Henry Morton for the moment forgot her.

Nelly, who was scarcely eighteen, was beginning to feel herself quite an old woman : every quarter of an hour of that evening was adding at least a year to her life ; existence was ripening for her with preternatural acceleration under the action of a sorrow deep and keen, which finds a lasting home only in woman's heart.

Miss Morton, to vary the amusement for her little *protégée* Matty, proposed a charade. Then there were cogitations in corners, there were withdrawals from the room, and there were returns in magnificent costumes. Even Mr. Wynum was impressed into the service. Wrapped in a large cloak, with a bright scarlet turban on his head and a long chi-

bouque applied to his lips, he enacted the part of a Pasha.

Of the performances in general—there were several charades—we shall content ourselves with saying that, when the histrionic talent displayed was at the *minimum*, the laughter reached the *maximum*, loss became gain, failure victory, and mirth and fun became the crowned presidents of the evening.

The charades came to a close. Then came more music and more conversation; there were attempts at open love-making, and there was a great deal of secret love-feeling.

Whilst Miss Maunsell, seated on a couch at the head of the room, was listening to Captain Wilmot's latest accounts of his little Fanny, Mrs. Archibald, Mrs. Wynum, and Madame Charleroi, having formed the principal portion of the audience during the performance of the charades, were now looking with pleased attention on the scene before them. It was an interval between the closing of one species of amusement and the commencement of another. Miss Morton was consulting with her brother and Monsieur Claude about fresh combinations: Cornets Rogers and Staunton were lending the aid of their wisdom and their wit. How well Margaret Morton looked! She wore a clear

white muslin dress, with high corsage and long sleeves, the transparent material rather enhancing than concealing the well-formed shoulders and delicately rounded arms of the wearer. A blue ribbon fastened round her throat, and from which hung a diamond cross, corresponded in colour with her sash. Her abundant dark hair was braided in Grecian fashion, and showed to advantage the classical contour of her head. Her liquid dark grey eyes looked black at night, but there was a varying light in them, at once soft and brilliant, a speciality of eyes of that colour. Miss Morton's tall and very slender figure gave no promise of ever expanding into the Juno-like proportions of Mrs. Wynum, the prototype on which little Nelly Hillston was formed.

The three matrons, who sat together on one side of the drawing-room, looked with much complacency on their juvenile connexions as they moved about. Mrs. Wynum saw that her two nieces were very pretty and very much admired. Madame Charleroi had never been better pleased with her son; and Mrs. Archibald, with self-complacent dignity, felt that her niece and nephews were worthy of their family.

Mrs. Archibald looked on the three young

ladies, at that moment within her range of vision, with the appraising eye of one who had seen much business done in the matrimonial market; and, reflecting in that spirit, she could not deny there was something impracticable about her niece. Possessing all the hereditary dignity, self-respect, and womanly pride of the women of her family, Margaret Morton superadded to these qualities a loftiness and width in her views of social and moral relations, the result of high mental culture, which by superficial observers might make her be reputed cold and unimpassionable, whilst in reality her feelings as well as her intellect were strengthened and refined by the training she had received. If Margaret Morton did not talk glibly, it was because she thought clearly; if she was not “a sweet engaging girl,” as the phrase goes, gushing in her friendships and overflowing in her affection for new acquaintances, it was because she understood the value of words, and had been taught to believe speech the golden coin that represents moral solvency. Mrs. Archibald had the highest opinion of her niece’s excellence. If she did not understand in detail in what Margaret’s real superiority consisted, of one thing at least she was certain, that were Margaret’s uncle living, he would be proud of his

niece—proud to see her have become all he intended she should be. Still, though appreciating and admiring her niece thus far, Mrs. Archibald, in the coolness of her matured judgment, felt that “to settle” Miss Morton in life would be a more difficult undertaking than “to settle” fifty ordinary young ladies. It was only very lately this conviction had come home to Mrs. Archibald’s mind ; it had made entrance there since she had had an opportunity of observing Margaret’s demeanour in the society of stranger gentlemen, which was within the past few months ; for, previous to Miss Morton’s acquaintance with Cornet Wynum and Monsieur Claude, she had known no young men beside her brother and cousin.

Whilst Mrs. Archibald dispassionately pronounced on her niece’s unmarketable qualities, she derived much comfort from the consideration that her nephew Richard was wholly unlike the generality of young men. He did not seek flirtations, as light-hearted Harry did ; his choice once made was unchangeable ; he was a pupil of his uncle’s training, brought up like Margaret, and therefore suited to her.

These convictions made Mrs. Archibald more and more satisfied with the line of conduct she had hitherto pursued with regard to her niece

and nephew. This satisfaction, if not wholly based on, was greatly increased by her belief that Margaret was a girl who could not easily find a husband ; for though Cornet Wynum, Captain Wilmot, and Monsieur Claude admired her, and though in the case of the first named there was evidence of profound passion, still Margaret Morton received all this homage as a queen might receive tribute from her vassals, with thanks, but no sense of obligation on her part. Mrs. Archibald would have been very sorry to see her niece a husband-hunter or a flirt ; but, in recognizing the strong individuality that distinguished Margaret, she rejoiced to think her fate was fixed, and, so rejoicing, more and more did she cherish the memory of the wise head and kind hand that had watched and tended the growth of the two plants destined to twine round each other in changeless love.

Mrs. Archibald had lapsed into a reverie whilst thinking in this guise. Suddenly awaking, she was about to apologize to the ladies between whom she was sitting, but she perceived they were as unmindful of her as she had been of them. Following the direction of their eyes, she saw a very animated scene being enacted at the other side of the room.

Mr. Wynum was seated near his nieces, whom, spite of their timidity, he was skilfully drawing into conversation, whilst Henry Morton and Cornets Rogers and Staunton were, emulous of each other, striving to please. So amusing were the young men, that Nelly forgot her grief, and Matty laid aside her timidity. So judicious was Mr. Wynum, that the fact of his nieces being well bred and well educated was made apparent, in spite of their bashfulness.

Cornet Wynum was standing at the mantelpiece, apparently listening to a discussion between Monsieur Charleroi and Mr. Browne, touching the political and social necessities of Europe, but in reality watching, with sidelong glances, Miss Morton, as she conversed with Monsieur Claude and Captain Wilmot.

Just then Mr. Wynum called his son. He wanted his confirmation of what had been asserted, that Miss Hillston could sing. Cornet Wynum bore testimony in the affirmative; and when Nelly looked up at him and said, "Oh, Charlie!—but not well," and when Charlie replied, "Yes, indeed, Nelly, very nicely," Henry Morton felt inclined to kick him downstairs or throw him out of window.

It being proved on the testimony of a reliable witness that Miss Hillston could sing, the same

witness, in self-justification, led her to the piano, where “Charlie” was asked what he would like; and as Charlie could not make up his mind as to what he liked, Nelly finally sang a little ballad that she had sung scores of times when Charlie was only her brother, and she believed herself his sister.

Charlie stood back from the piano whilst Nelly was singing. Mr. Wynum remained beside her. When the song ceased, a voice said softly to the young cornet,—

“Charlie, this reminds us of home. Would you like to be home again?”

Charlie wished he were in his grave. He did not tell his aunt so, but tried to make a very manly and affectionate reply; and as the prelude to a fresh song immediately sounded, he was spared the embarrassment of being entangled in his own words.

Everybody praised Miss Hillston’s musical performance, no one more warmly than Miss Morton, no one more judiciously and affectionately than Mr. Wynum, who invited Mr. Morton to reconduct her to her seat, whither he soon turned his own steps, accompanied by Cornets Rogers and Staunton, and whither he soon after called his son.

Henry Morton had had the priority in Miss

Hillston's acquaintance over Cornets Rogers and Staunton, and he had, in his own belief, profited by the advantage. He had done all in his power to amuse the pretty little Nelly; and if Rogers and Staunton had vied with him, it was in an honourable way, fair and above board, he was ready to admit. But here comes Cornet Wynum, and without making the slightest effort to please, going rather in the opposite direction, he overturns the balance and spoils the conviviality of the group, throws Miss Hillston into a flutter, and brings tears to her eyes. Having enumerated these symptoms of distress, which his instinct at first interpreted correctly, his pride ascended the rostrum, and assured him in profound confidence that the girl's uncle and aunt were trying to force her into a marriage she abhorred.

If the attentions of Mr. Morton were wasted on Nelly Hillston, the homage offered by the two *militaires* fell equally flat. It was unmistakably plain that in Miss Hillston's case early associations had ripened into love, and when she called Cornet Wynum "Charlie," she did so with a blushing timidity that betrayed a feeling different from a sister's love.

Poor Charlie Wynum was to be pitied.

Were he a vain fop, he would have been gratified by the jealousy of Henry Morton and of the two brilliant soldiers; but, as it was, he only saw in their attentions to his cousin a source of fresh complications. How willingly would he have acted the part of a brother towards Nelly, and given her away at the altar to any one of his rivals; but he never would have the chance. And here historian honesty obliges us to say that, instead of admiring the womanly devotedness of Nelly's child-like heart, he would have been glad to see her change her love as easily as she might the ribbon of her bonnet. It would have made matters so smooth.

Cornet Wynum, you are selfish—that we should live to say so!—and unreasonable. Whilst you are yourself being tossed from wave to wave on the breast of the angry ocean, you wonder that a wrecked fellow-passenger does not float quietly into harbour.

The party at Eva Terrace broke up. Cornet Wynum accompanied his aunt and cousins to the hotel, where having arrived, “Good night” was immediately said, it being then a full hour past midnight.

Mrs. Wynum went into her nieces' room before retiring to her own. She was a fond

and careful aunt ; her orphan nieces had long been accustomed to receive from her a mother's affection. She now urged them to get quickly to bed, and said Nelly looked fatigued. And so she did ; but Matty was in great spirits, and so loquacious as to justify a doubt whether she would ever again be silent. She was delighted with everything and every person she had seen at Eva Terrace, but, above all things and all persons, Miss Morton was the theme of her praise. There never was any one in the world before so good, so kind, so beautiful ; and she appealed to her aunt, who said quietly Miss Morton was very nice ; and then she challenged Nelly to say whether she had ever seen anybody that could compare with Miss Morton. Nelly burst into tears, threw her arms round her aunt's neck, and sobbed on her bosom.

Matty was stunned.

CHAPTER V.

IT is not to be supposed that so experienced a matron as Mrs. Wynam could be twenty-four hours acquainted with the various segments of the circle in which her nephew had been living for the past few months, without forming a pretty correct opinion as to the state of parties and hearts within the magic ring. Her observations and conclusions had made her uncomfortable, so much so that she had recourse to her brother-in-law, whose ascendancy over her mind was greater now than ever. Mr. Wynam assured her she was mistaken, that what she believed to be lions in her pathway were only shadows; and he further promised that she should have abundant proof of the correctness of his assertions.

It was with a view to the fulfilment of this promise that Mr. Wynam made an appointment with his son for the morning following

the dinner. He requested the cornet to be with him as much before noon as he could ; and as the young man was just then in a wakeful state, to which many causes contributed, he arrived at St. John's Terrace soon after eleven. Mr. Wynum had already break-fasted, and was taking his ease in a luxurious arm-chair—his own property, not Mrs. Green's —whilst he enjoyed his morning cigar. Accepting his father's invitation, Charlie lighted a cigar, and both smoked for some time in silence. At length Mr. Wynum began,—

“ Well, Charlie, I'm glad to hear your aunt and cousins are well this morning. You break-fasted together, of course ?”

“ Yes, father.”

“ Your aunt is a fine woman, Charlie—a very fine woman. I'm quite proud, Charlie, I assure you, of my fair sister and my lovely nieces.”

Mr. Wynum was fond of calling Nelly and Matty his nieces. It was a distinction their wealth deserved.

As Charlie had made no response to his father's last remark, Mr. Wynum went on,—

“ They are two lovely girls, are Matty and Nelly. Their names, too, are so simple, so homely. I like their names—Nelly, Matty.

They speak to a man's heart ; they call up visions of home—of hearth and home. Don't they, Charlie ?”

Charlie was silent. Taking a few long-drawn whiffs of his cigar, his face became shrouded in a thick wrapping of smoke. His father, having obtained no reply to the question with which his slowly pronounced address had terminated, thought proper to answer himself.

“ Of course they do. Yes, my dear boy, I know they remind you of hearth and home. Matty is a dear little girl. Don't you think so, Charlie ?”

“ I do, indeed, father.”

“ But 'tis bad taste in me to praise Matty rather than Nelly. When I say Matty is a dear little girl, I mean she is little more than a child, and a pretty, playful, innocent little creature. I make no comparison between her and her sister. Nelly is much superior : she is more womanly, more thoughtful, and far handsomer. Charlie, you 're a fortunate young man ”—Charlie groaned—“ a very fortunate young man, Charlie, and I, as your father, feel great satisfaction—in fact, a praiseworthy pride, in contemplating your prospects.”

Here Mr. Wynam made a short pause, but

meeting with no interruption, he continued, "Charlie, you're my only son, my only child. After I lost your dear mother, I entrusted you to the care of your aunt and uncle. Whatever sacrifice I made on that occasion was made for your benefit. Your uncle had no children ; you were his legal heir. I knew my sister-in-law, and had no hesitation in confiding my son to her. She has been a second mother to you, Charlie ; she has replaced the mother you lost ; she has done for you what few mothers could do for a son,—she has brought up a wife for you ; and a wife brought up by such a woman must be a treasure. Now, Charlie, I give you my opinion, which, my dear boy, I see you've hesitated to ask. Nelly is a charming creature, and I'm ready to receive her—to take her to my heart as a daughter."

Charles leaned back in his chair, and groaned audibly. Mr. Wynum, no ways moved, shook the ashes from his cigar.

"Besides," he went on, slowly whiffing away, "a man's more respectable by being married. If there's anything in my past life I regret, it is not having married earlier ; but, then, I didn't know your mother at the period to which I allude. I foresee our little Nelly

will be just such a wife as your mother was."

Response—a groan from son. Father continues:—

"When I reflect, Charlie, on all your uncle has done for you, I experience a feeling for my brother, in gratitude for his conduct towards you, that I never felt before. In fact, Charlie, your uncle and I have been rather estranged for some years past; but that made no difference in his treatment of you. He brought you up to trade, to be the heir of his actual position as well as of his wealth. Trade, my dear boy, is the bone and sinew of England; 'tis the source of her wealth, and, being the source of her wealth, is the source of her respectability."

"You didn't go into trade yourself, father."

"No,"—this musingly,—“but my case was exceptional. I'm perhaps altogether an exceptional person. But, waiving the question of trade, your uncle, when you disappointed his hopes, and abandoned tr—the pursuits for which he had brought you up, your uncle, I say, didn't fly into a passion and cut you off. He allowed you to gratify your military whim, and made you an allowance. Charlie, there are

noblemen's sons in your regiment that haven't such an allowance as you."

"'Tis true, father, and I'm grateful to uncle; but money alone isn't sufficient to make a fellow happy."

"Quite true, my boy. That's what I'm coming to. Your uncle's money would be nothing to you without little Nelly Hillston to share it. Eh, Charlie?"

Mr. Wynum put the interrogatory in a jocose tone.

"Father, Nelly is very good,—oh, very good—perhaps too good for me; but what is she to Miss Morton?"

And having pronounced that name, Cornet Wynum seemed to gather strength. He sat upright in his chair, leaned his arm on the table, and looked steadily at his father. Mr. Wynum stared vaguely back, then made a visual semicircular sweep of a portion of the ceiling, and dropped his eyes again on his son's face in a vacant stare.

"Miss Morton!" he said; "what has that lady to do with the matter?"

"She has this to do with it,"—the young man rose from his seat, and stood with folded arms in front of his father,—“that I love her as man has never yet loved woman; that I'd

rather live a beggar for her sake than marry the richest woman in England ; I'd rather be shot on the battle-field—Heaven knows during the last three months I often wished I were shot. But this I do say, father,"—the cornet, having once broken the ice of restraint, was boldly outspoken,—“if I don't marry Miss Morton, I'll never marry.”

“ My dear boy,”—Mr. Wynum came near to his son, and placed his hand on the young man's shoulder,—“ I'm glad, very glad, to see you so resolute. Sit down—sit down, and let us talk this matter over. You're determined to marry Miss Morton ? ”

“ Yes, father, or no one.”

“ Very good. I might have wished a different daughter-in-law, though I have the highest, the very highest opinion of Miss Morton ; but you've made your choice : that's final. Believe me, Charlie, whatever is for your happiness will always meet my concurrence.”

“ Oh, father, you're very good.”

“ My dear boy, I only do my duty. Your happiness as my only son, my only child, must be dearer to me than any consideration on earth. But, Charlie, I must confess I'm rather taken by surprise. I had no idea things had gone to such a length between you and Miss

Morton. You say you're determined to marry her; that implies you have ascertained her sentiments. You have spoken to her, of course?"

"I speak to Miss Morton of marriage! Certainly not."

"But, my dear boy, you say you're determined to marry her. You can't marry a young lady without her own consent."

"Of course not."

The cornet looked puzzled.

"Of course not. But you're sure of her sentiments?"

A long pause; question repeated.

"No, father, I'm not."

"Have you any doubts?"

"The greatest."

"That's unfortunate—very unfortunate. A man should be sure of his ground before he makes an offer of marriage to a woman."

"But how can he?"

"How can he? My dear boy, unless a woman be a heartless coquette, which Miss Morton certainly is not, she gives that kind of approval to a man's advances that encourages him to make a formal declaration. If Miss Morton has given you no such encouragement, be cautious; I say, be cautious, Charlie."

Nothing would pain me more than to see my son become an object of ridicule."

"An object of ridicule?"

"Yes, my boy, an object of ridicule. Let us put the case this way. You're determined to marry Miss Morton, you say. Very good. You can't marry her without her consent. Very good. Are you resolved to ask Miss Morton before you leave for India?"

"I don't know. I suppose I must,"—very hesitatingly.

"Very good; you suppose you must. You do so without grounds, and you're rejected. You put yourself in a ridiculous position. Miss Morton tells her aunt; the aunt laughs, and tells Miss Maunsell, who turns up her eyes and hands, and laughs, and 'Oh dears!' and next morning tells Mrs. Green, who in the evening tells Mrs. Clifton; and before three days you're the laughing-stock of Kensington."

"Miss Morton wouldn't be capable—"

"Charlie, Miss Morton is a woman. Excellent, admirable as she is, she is only a woman. And Charlie, remember this through life,—in your dealings with the opposite sex, the best of 'em are only women. They like a conquest. If they respond to a lover's feelings, they're devoted, generous, noble-minded; but if they

cannot sympathize with a man, 'tis astonishing how indifferent they are, and how they laugh at him. That seems horrible. Let us turn the other side of the medallion. How do we treat women who happen to conceive an affection for us, that we cannot reciprocate?"

The cornet sighed and looked guilty. Silence obtained, during which smoking progressed rapidly. At the end of ten minutes, Mr. Wynum took his cigar from his mouth, and holding it at some distance, after having shaken off the ash, spoke. "I've often remarked," he said, "in life that men fling away happiness, as it were, wantonly. They persistently offer homage to women that despise 'em,—women that, like the conquerors of old, would like to see captives fastened to their chariot wheels, and, meanwhile, these men cast off, reject, fling aside hearts that could make 'em—happy. There is nothing, I believe, in this world so trifled with as happiness. Now, in your case, my dear boy—I speak dispassionately, Charlie, as a friend, not with the authority of a father—it seems to me you're flinging away your happiness. There's your cousin, sweet little Nelly."

"My dear father," broke in the son, "don't mention Nelly. I couldn't love her; I mean,

I do love her, but 'tis as a brother, only as a brother."

"And you love Miss Morton with another kind of love; and you 'll make a declaration and be rejected, and render yourself ridiculous."

Another long pause, broken by Cornet Wynum.

"Father, 'tis very well to talk so of Miss Morton; but she gives me as much encouragement as she gives any one else,—quite as much as she gives her cousin, Mr. Archibald."

"Quite true. Miss Morton gives you as much encouragement as she gives any one else, which is none at all. Miss Morton knows her lot is fixed. She has been educated to be her cousin's wife; he knows he's to be her husband; and really, Charlie, it scarcely looks well in you, to try to overturn Mrs. Archibald's family arrangements. People may say 'twas ungrateful, a breach of hospitality; some may even say 'twas ungentlemanly."

Another pause. Cornet Wynum speaks:—

"I hope nobody will ever be able to say, with justice, that I have acted in a manner unbecoming a gentleman; but, father,"—the young man spoke very firmly,—“you must admit you encouraged my love for Miss Mor-

ton. But for you, my love would never have reached the point at which it now stands."

"Charlie, my dear boy, what do you mean? You astonish me. I never heard of your love for Miss Morton till this morning."

"Oh, father. Wasn't it you that took my part, that beat down Archibald till Miss Morton herself saw he wasn't the great fellow he put up to be, and Morton saw it too, and came back to my side?"

"My dear boy,"—Mr. Wynum spoke with an honest sincerity of tone,—“you confound me. When I put down Archibald, it wasn't that I suspected any affection on your part for Miss Morton; 'twas simply because I wouldn't allow us to be put down by any one. Archibald is a young man of very good attainments, but not equal to *my* son. Charlie, no one shall put us down.”

Charlie leaned back in his chair confounded. Here was the secret of the great battle his father had fought. If he did not speak for some little time, it was because his thoughts were in a tumult. Mr. Wynum continued to explain his views.

“No, Charlie; he's not equal to you.”

“Oh, father, you're very good!”

“No. I speak dispassionately; I judge

you as a stranger. You're superior to Archibald. Don't speak, Charlie. Take my word for it. I know men, and I know women. Much as I admire Miss Morton, I say Nelly is superior to her."

"Father! that's impossible. Nobody *could* be superior to Miss Morton—nobody is equal to her."

"Charlie, you're a young man—a very young man; you speak under a delusion. You're in love, but you're in love with the wrong person." Charlie groaned. "Now, my dear boy, I tell you from my experience what you will one day know by your own. The woman a man ought to esteem the most highly is the woman who knows best how to appreciate him. By Jove, sir,"—here Mr. Wynum rose and strode proudly across the room,—"the finest woman that ever stepped the earth couldn't extract a sigh from me if I thought she wasn't prepared to respond. You're throwing away your happiness, Charlie; you're making yourself ridiculous for the sake of a woman that doesn't care for you; and you're overlooking the sweet little cousin that loves you and could make you happy,—yes, Charlie, happy and rich."

"Stop, father, pray stop!" Cornet Wynum

stood up, and looked the portrait of candour and honesty as he said,—

“Father, I couldn’t marry Nelly Hillston ; it would be a crime.”

“A crime ?”

“Yes. ‘Tis a crime in my eyes to marry a woman I don’t love, and that I know I never could love. Besides,” and his face flushed, “the very word you used, ‘rich,’ makes me feel how mean it would be to marry a woman because she has money, when I don’t love her, when I know I never could love her.”

Mr. Wynum had recourse to his cigar, which he diminished by one-quarter of its length before he said,—

“I suppose, Charlie, you’d think it a clever thing of me, and a proof of great affection, if I succeeded in arranging a marriage between you and Miss Morton.”

“My dear father ! I know you could do it. You can do anything you like.”

“Very good. Let us suppose I succeed. How would you support your wife ?”

“I have plenty of money ; I always have plenty of money.”

“Where does it come from ?”

The cornet paused before he replied, and

looked rather foolish as he said in a low and hesitating tone,—

“ From my uncle.”

“ Very good. You’re your uncle’s heir, Charlie, and he allows you what I call a splendid income. But remember, my boy, you’re not heir to hereditary estates, but to personal wealth ; and your uncle is free to choose another heir, if he quarrels with you. He can leave all his property to his wife’s nieces.”

“ And let him. I don’t care : I’ll not sell myself.”

“ Certainly not. Let him choose another heir, and what becomes of Miss Morton ?”

“ I can work to support my wife.”

“ No doubt. But your work would never bring enough to support Miss Morton. She’s a young lady brought up in ease and luxury ; she knows as little the value of money as you do. Now, Charlie, that’s what I call committing a crime towards a woman, to allure her into poverty and degrade her into drudgery. A man of common sense and a gentleman of honour should always keep such eventualities before his eyes.”

Another pause, broken by Cornet Wynum, who, in a tone of stern resolve, says,—

“I’ll never marry.”

“O yes, you ’ll marry, Charlie : but, if you don’t marry at the right time, you don’t marry the right person ; and in the end you ’ll marry at the wrong time, and you ’ll marry the wrong person.”

“I ’ll never marry,” the young man repeated, almost doggedly.

The cigars were again brought into requisition, and were kept a considerable time on duty.

“Charlie,” said Mr. Wynum, breaking the smoky silence, “we ’ve had a long conversation. I have spoken to you, not with the authority of a father, but with the familiar confidence of a friend. We have discussed fairly—I think fairly on both sides, certainly so on mine—this question of love or marriage, or whatever it may be that disturbs your mind. We ’ve seen—what indeed it required no great amount of perception to discover—that Miss Morton doesn’t care a pin’s point for you ;”—the cornet writhed on his chair. “Neither does she care a pin for any one else,”—the cornet sat erect. “No, my dear boy, Miss Morton is a young lady whose thoughts are not easily read ; but I think I can divine them. She knows her fate is fixed, and she walks on

calmly, haughtily, and determinately to the inevitable goal. She doesn't love you, Charlie,"—Charlie winced; "she never would love you,"—Charlie groaned; "because she knows she oughtn't to love a man that couldn't maintain her in the position in which she has been brought up. She doesn't love Archibald,"—the cornet brightened; "but she'll love him when she's his wife." The cornet groaned more deeply than before.

Another long pause.

"I think," resumed Mr. Wynum, "we've settled this question as far as concerns Miss Morton. She's entirely beyond your reach. By Jove, Charlie,"—the son had fetched a deep-drawn sigh,—"in your position, I'd say she was beneath your consideration."

The son started, and "Never!" burst from his lips.

"Quite right, quite right; we'll say Miss Morton is beyond your grasp. Now, what do you want? A wife? Miss Morton can never be your wife: she wouldn't be. I don't say she despises you,—she has too much good sense for that; but she'd be very sorry to marry you." A deep groan from the other side of the table. "A woman who couldn't respond to my feelings, no matter from what motives,

and who acted as though she despised me—by Jove, sir, I'd despise her, and show her I could do without her."

Another long pause. At last Mr. Wynum speaks,—

"We've dismissed Miss Morton from our thoughts,"—Cornet Wynum had done nothing of the kind,—“and what remains? Nelly Hillston, my sweet little Nelly.” Mr. Wynum seemed much affected, and laid great stress on the possessive pronoun, as he repeated, “my sweet little Nelly. She has wealth—’tis her least attraction; she has youth, loveliness, and love, best gift of all. Charlie, ’tisn’t in the nature of man to be insensible to such attractions”—the speaker knew well to the contrary, barring the wealth. “What am I to think? Is it because I love Nelly, because I’m ready to take her to my heart as a daughter, that you refuse her as a wife?”

“Oh, father, father!”

“Peace for a few moments, Charlie. I feel I’m put on my defence before my own son, perhaps that in your heart you charge me with having neglected your early years; perhaps you say to yourself that having given up my parental rights to your uncle and aunt, I’ve no longer any authority over you.”

"Oh, father, father! Don't kill me."

"Charlie, I'm humbling myself to you—to my own son; but I must explain. When I lost your dear mother"—Mr. Wynum took out his handkerchief, and Charlie turned very pale—"I felt in my great grief that I was unequal to any exertion; above all, I felt I couldn't be to you what she had been. I knew what an excellent woman your aunt was, and I resigned my son to her care. In doing so, Charlie, I sacrificed my feelings to your interests. A selfish father would have kept his son with him to divert his loneliness, to amuse his leisure; but I thought of my child's welfare, and I—yes, Charlie—I martyred myself. Stay, Charlie; don't interrupt. You return to me. I see my son, and I'm proud of him. Yes, Charlie, I'm proud of you, very proud of you. You remind me of your dear mother, Charlie." Poor Charlie's face was by this time very white, and Mr. Wynum's handkerchief was on active duty. "And then comes sweet little Nelly, and my heart, a father's heart, springs to meet her. I never had a daughter; 'tis a tie I've often longed for, but which I find now I'm destined never to know. I don't ask you to marry Nelly,—perhaps such a request on my part would serve as an incentive to an opposite line of conduct;

but at least, I hope my son will act as a gentleman."

During the latter part of this speech Cornet Wynum's arms had been crossed on the table, and his head resting on them. He now looked up; his face was pale, and there were traces of tears on his cheeks, but the tone of his voice was steady as he said,—

"As a gentleman, father?"

"Yes, Charlie, as a gentleman. You've won your cousin's affections; your uncle and aunt have come to look on you as Nelly's future husband; they have felt pleasure in thinking their wealth would be enjoyed by their common relatives. Now, how stands the case?"

"Father," interrupted the cornet, "I deny, distinctly deny, that I ever made an effort to win Nelly's affections."

"My dear boy, you did so, nevertheless. You knew perfectly well Nelly was not your sister; she knew you were not her brother. You weren't a baby when your aunt took charge of you. Under these circumstances, and as you grew up together, every effort you made to please Nelly was a trap for her love. Don't start! I'm obliged to speak plainly. I cannot acquit you of having behaved badly to your uncle and aunt, and, above all, to my

sweet little Nelly. By Jove, Charlie, the thing looks badly for you and for me."

"For you, father!"

"Yes. I introduce you to Mrs. Archibald's house, and you attempt to upset her family arrangements, which are similar to those made by your uncle in his family. My dear boy, such conduct is foolish as regards your own interests, and it don't look well in the eyes of the world."

Another long pause, during which Mr. Wynum smokes slowly and thoughtfully; the cornet, with his elbows rested on the table, keeps his face covered with his hands.

Mr. Wynum speaks,—“Charlie, I've spoken to you calmly and as a friend. I haven't assumed the authority of a father because, having seemingly renounced those rights, I may not plausibly reassume them. I have shown you the folly of nourishing a passion for Miss Morton; the madness of making a declaration to her, for she'd laugh at you, and I don't wish to see my son made an object of ridicule. I've laid all this before you, and without effect. I must now go further. Charlie, I'm about to ask you a favour.”

Mr. Wynum rose, and, coming close to his son, laid his hand on his shoulder. “I, who

have so seldom asked a favour during my life, am now entreating my own son. Charlie, must I entreat in vain?"

"Oh, father, you stab me to the heart! You'll kill me! I'll do anything you please."

"Oh, Charlie, if your mother lived to see this day, to see her son refuse her husband—his own father—a slight favour, such a sight would kill her!"

Two tears, which had risen to Mr. Wynum's eyes at the beginning of the last sentence, now fell on his cheeks. Charlie caught his father in his arms, and sobbed.

"Father! if you knew how miserable I am! I wish I were dead!"

"An impious wish, my boy, a most impious wish, and shows how little—I'm sorry to say it—how little you regard my feelings."

"Oh, father! father! I'm so miserable!"

"Come, come, Charlie, be a man. We all go through this at least once in our lives. A time will come when you'll laugh at it."

"Laugh!—laugh at my own misery!"

"Yes, my boy. A time will come when you'll think of Miss Morton with as much calmness as of a marble statue—a time when, perhaps, you will have forgotten my dear little

Nelly, though I'm afraid her sensitive heart would break under such treatment”—a deep groan from the cornet; “but, Charlie, even then, when you'll have forgotten the woman that you now fancy you love to distraction, and when you'll have forgotten the woman that truly loves you, and that you cruelly slight—don't interrupt, Charlie—even then you'll remember your father. You haven't forgotten your mother, Charlie ?”

“No, no, father; I could never forget her !”

“Then, Charlie, in her name I ask you a favour which I haven't influence enough to obtain myself,—in the name of that dear saintly being that never refused me or you anything she could grant.”

Charlie was sobbing, and Mr. Wynum was quite overcome.

“Father,” said the young man at length, “I'll do anything you please—anything at all.”

Mr. Wynum clasped his son in his arms.

“My dear boy, I hope I shall one day have the happiness of holding your son in my arms as I now hold you.”

No reply; but Cornet Wynum was thoroughly convinced that the earth would be soon de-

populated did the perpetuation of the human race depend on his posterity.

Mr. Wynum had resumed his seat, and was wiping his eyes, looking affectionately all the while at his son.

“Oh, Charlie, you’ve made me happy, very happy, by saying you’ll be guided by me. I had begun to fear, I had indeed, Charlie, that I had no place in your affections.”

“My dear father, I’m ready to do anything you please, only pray don’t ask me to marry—immediately, at least.”

“My dear boy”—and Mr. Wynum laughed—“if I were ever so anxious to see you married, and you were ever so inclined to marry, there’s not time for such a ceremony. Ha! ha! ha! Really, Charlie, ‘tis too bad of you to make me laugh so.”

Charlie, who was always glad to see his father laugh, smiled, and drew a long breath, as if much relieved.

“Well, Charlie, I’ll tell you what I wish. I wish you to show your aunt you’re not ungrateful for her motherly care. I wish you to show my sweet little Nelly that you’re not a heartless scoundrel—don’t interrupt, Charlie, I must speak the truth; and above all, Charlie, I wish you to show the frequenters

of Eva Terrace that you're not a sniveller,—that you know your value—the value, Charlie, that your father sets upon you."

Charlie smiled, well pleased. Mr. Wynum rang the bell, and requested Mrs. Green, when that lady appeared in the room, to place sherry and biscuits on the table. The order—for it was an order, though couched in humble phrase—having been obeyed, Mr. Wynum filled two glasses. Truth to say, the poor cornet required a stimulant to restore his equilibrium; and truth impels us further to add that Mr. Wynum too stood in need of a restorative: a man of sixty-two cannot go through such scenes unshaken.

The wine having been drunk, Mr. Wynum having exchanged his dressing-gown for an outdoor costume, and the poor cornet having bathed his tear-stained face, Mr. Wynum again rang the bell, and requested Mrs. Green, with his compliments, to ask Miss Maunsell if she could afford him a few minutes' conversation. A favourable answer having been returned to this communication, Mr. Wynum descended to the so-called first floor, leaving his son in the so-called drawing-room to collect his scattered perceptions.

Mr. Wynum's object in calling on Miss

Maunsell was to ask her a favour, which favour having been granted, and some consequences naturally flowing from the accordance of this favour having been discussed, Mr. Wynum rejoined his son, and both took their way in a cab to the Bath Hotel.

Having arrived at the hospitable mansion where all are well received who can pay, Mr. Wynum made the most elaborate apologies to his sister-in-law and nieces for not having sooner made his appearance. Not only had he committed this great crime, but he had been guilty of involving his son in a similar transgression. His only plea was the feelings of a father about to separate from his only child; but whether that plea would be accepted at the Horse Guards, where Charlie had an appointment, he really did not know.

"So now, Charlie, having paid your respects to your aunt and cousins, which you would have done earlier but for me, we'll release you, and allow you to set about the discharge of sterner duties. I'll take charge of the ladies. If your aunt has no objection, we'll go to the theatre in the evening, where you can join us with your friends."

All these suggestions having been resolved into engagements, Cornet Wynum departed.

Mr. Wynum played his part to perfection. He satisfied his sister-in-law as to the groundlessness of her apprehensions, and delighted his nieces with anecdotes drawn from his experiences; he subdued the beatings of little Nelly's heart by calling her again and again his "dear little daughter," at which her mother-aunt smiled complacently. She had boundless faith in her brother-in-law.

The same evening, Mrs. Wynum's party at the theatre was augmented by the arrival of Cornet Wynum, and Cornets Rogers and Staunton, the two latter greatly edified by Wynum's disinterestedness in inviting them when such an attractive girl as Nelly Hillston was in question. The whole party supped at the hotel. Cornet Wynum's demeanour was such as to gratify his aunt and make little Nelly feel almost happy, whilst the drolleries of the two other *militaires* kept Matty in roars of laughter.

Mr. Wynum told his son at parting that evening that, should they never meet again, he might always be happy in the recollection of the comfort he had that day conferred on his father.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the following afternoon Mr. Wynum made a call at Eva Terrace. This was so unusual an occurrence that an augur might have called up all his divining skill to inquire what it foreboded. But though an augur might have sought supernatural means to explain the motives of Mr. Wynum's visit, Mrs. Archibald did nothing of the kind, and for the very simple reason that she knew all about it beforehand, her informant being Miss Maunsell. So when Mr. Wynum made his unwonted morning visit, Mrs. Archibald was quite prepared to receive him; and this in more senses than one.

Mr. Wynum, having made his bow, taken his seat, and received assurances of Mrs. Archibald's being in her customary state of health, opened the subject of his visit. It was to request that Mrs. Archibald and Miss Morton would favour him on the following day with their company at dinner. The time that

remained of Cornet Wynum's stay was short, too short for written invitations, so Mr. Wynum thought himself bound to make his request in person.

The invitation having been cheerfully accepted, and many pretty things having been said as bearing thereon, Mrs. Archibald tried a premeditated manœuvre. She, with artistic shadings and diplomatic skilfulness, gave Mr. Wynum to understand she perceived the game he was playing with regard to his son and Miss Hillston, and hinted that her services were at his disposal, his interest and hers being identical. And this was expressed in phraseology to be understood only by those concerned, and which the gentleman addressed understood very well, and to which he replied in the same strain, his reply being equivalent to saying he was master of the situation, and stood not in need of foreign aid.

This, though a defeat, was well received by Mrs. Archibald, inasmuch as it implied that the conflict, prolonged for months, was drawing to a close, and that the Elysian repose she so loved was again within her grasp.

The dinner-party for which Mr. Wynum had delivered oral invitations went off harmoniously, Miss Maunsell presiding. Madame

Charleroi gave it as her opinion that it was the most agreeable dinner of the series. Madame Charleroi's belief in this repast was the natural growth of the pleasure she experienced in having made Mrs. Wynum's acquaintance, that lady having conceived quite a liking for the amiable foreigner, and pressed her warmly to pay her a visit in the North.

Cornet Wynum's behaviour during the evening pleased his father and delighted his aunt, to say nothing of his cousins—one in particular. He remained near these ladies, or hovering about them, the greater part of the time, making desperate efforts to be cheerful. He called to his aid Mr. Morton, as well as his friends Rogers and Staunton, all of whom pronounced him a generous, free-hearted fellow.

Mr. Wynum, whose duties as host called him to every point of the compass, contrived, notwithstanding, to bestow a great deal of his society on Miss Morton, and he cleverly contrived that his conversations with that young lady should be *tête-à-tête*. This he did by placing anybody likely to intrude in a position from which escape for the moment was impossible. Captain Wilmot engrossed by Miss Maunsell, Richard Archibald engaged with Monsieur Charleroi, discussing some point of

international law, Monsieur Claude arranging duets and quartets at the piano with Miss Keel, were all for the moment firmly chained.

Then Mr. Wynum singled out Miss Morton and talked with her. He descanted in elaborate phraseology on the eminent position woman holds in civilized and Christian society. He believed, and his belief was founded on experience, that every woman, more or less, but in the highest degree the woman of cultivated mind, influences the fate of every man that comes within her sphere. She influences for good or ill. The high-minded woman, she in whom the grander qualities of her sex were fully developed, was sure to shed a beneficent influence around. Men might, under a temporary delusion, call the sentiment she inspired love; but such a woman would know better, and would secure the esteem of her male acquaintances for ever by rejecting the ephemeral sentiment they mistook for love. For his part he could not imagine a nobler position than that of a woman so situated. She cast away the transient and grasped the permanent. But then it was only a woman of vast mental calibre, of great intellectual acquirements, of high moral feeling, that could be capable of despising the fleeting conquest of a young

man's heart, and instead of making him her toy, the object of her sport, become really to him a guardian angel by leading him to good; and strangely enough the leading in this case was effected by repulsion, by repelling, by casting off rudely the misguided youth. He was once acquainted, was Mr. Wynum, with a lady, young, but of remarkable endowments. A young man chanced to make her acquaintance, and was dazzled as any young man might be. But his family had other projects for him, and, strangely enough, the young lady's family had other projects for her. Neither had money, but each had prospects of a very good settlement in life, not through hereditary succession, but by family arrangements. The young lady was not only high-minded, but was possessed of much good sense. She knew a woman commits a folly when she marries a man who has nothing but prospects: such likings soon wear out. The young lady understood her interests, and she elected to guard them, and, at the same time, take a high position in regard to the young man and his family; and she did so. Mr. Wynum knew every woman was not capable of acting in that way,—very few were. Miss Morton was capable of acting so, undoubtedly, but she was ex-

ceptional. Like Mr. Wynum's fair young friend, Miss Morton was too proud to be vain: she, too, would prefer the solidity of permanent esteem to the disturbing folly of a transient fancy. It was not to be wondered at. A young lady brought up as Miss Morton had been, under the guidance of his great-hearted friend, Archibald, was not to be judged, and could not act, like ordinary young ladies.

Miss Morton understood Mr. Wynum as clearly as though he had written his thoughts in large text-hand on foolscap, and instead of vague generalities, had boldly inserted the pronouns first person singular and second plural.

Miss Morton was soon after seated beside her aunt, who was in conversation with Madame Charleroi. Mr. Wynum joined them, and having started some question on which he soon found he wanted Richard Archibald's assistance and that of Monsieur Claude, he drew both gentlemen into the group. His next move was to entice Mrs. Wynum from the other end of the room, where she was very happy listening to Cornets Wynum, Rogers, and Staunton making mirth for her nieces. Having brought his sister-in-law within Mrs. Archibald's circle, Mr. Wynum took her place, and kept his son on duty till supper-time.

When Miss Morton retired with the other ladies to put on her bonnet in Miss Maunsell's room, she wished Mrs. Wynum and her nieces "Good-night" in that chamber, and did not again make her appearance above-stairs till they and Cornet Wynum had driven off in the direction of their hotel.

On the following day but one Mrs. Wynum and her nieces paid a morning visit to Mrs. Archibald. The ladies were accompanied by Mr. Wynum and his son. Miss Morton's demeanour towards the latter, though detracting in no wise from their established easy familiarity, was still such as to make him feel that he could never expect to awaken a warmer sentiment in her heart than that of friendly regard ; it was such as to make him feel that his father's son, even were his personal merits less, would have been equally well received by her. And all this was done in a way to be understood without the intervention of words.

Miss Morton was very much pleased to see Nelly Hillston, and seemed resolved on entertaining her exclusively. She sat beside her and told her what great friends Mr. Wynum and her uncle Archibald had been, and how Mrs. Archibald cherished Mr. Wynum as one of her oldest friends, and received his son in

her house on the same footing as she did her nephews.

"We all look on him in that light," continued Margaret. "Whilst he was with us," she added, smiling, "he was one of us; now that his own family come to claim him, we are glad to see him so much happier than we could make him."

Nelly Hillston felt wonderfully comforted, and almost happy. On the way back to the hotel she told Matty, in a whisper, she believed there *was* no one like Miss Morton. How thankful Nelly was that she had yielded to her aunt's solicitations, and made the visit to Mrs. Archibald! It was sore against her inclinations, for she could not bear to see Charlie in Miss Morton's society. He always seemed so absorbed in her, and, at the same time, so unhappy. How thankful she was, and how wonderful it seemed that Miss Morton should say the things she said. It was just as if Miss Morton knew what was passing in her mind; but that was impossible, for she had never told anybody, not even her aunt. And Nelly's spirits rose in the assurance suddenly conveyed to her heart that she had no rival. And her spirits rose still higher in her faith in the force of her love, which must eventually—so

she reasoned—touch Charlie's heart. Nelly reasoned as thousands have reasoned, and believed she only could appreciate the one she loved. Still, amid all her thankfulness for the happy turn things had taken, she could not help wondering that Miss Morton made so little of Charlie, and spoke of him as though he were nothing more than other young men.

Mrs. Wynum returned to her hotel, confirmed in her old faith that there was no one like her brother-in-law. He was a man who could mould every one to his will. It was he who had influenced Miss Morton to declare herself as she had done ; of that she felt convinced. Mrs. Wynum was very much pleased ; but whilst she admired Miss Morton's manner of acting, she gave the chief credit to the master-mind that could achieve what it would when it condescended to exert itself.

Charlie Wynum returned to his hotel under the impression there was no one like his father. The young cornet felt he had received the *coup de grâce* from Miss Morton, and believed his father had worked upon her to do as she had done. His mind was in a tumult all the more wild because of one thought of spectral ghastliness that overshadowed and permeated all. *He*

believed he had erred in bestowing his confidence on his father.

Mr. Wynum left Mrs. Archibald's satisfied with himself and discontented with Miss Morton. That young lady had done her part too well. Mr. Wynum had wished her to act generously, magnanimously : he had hinted, had suggested this, and she had acted generously and magnanimously ; but she had done so with an unassumed ease that proved she made no sacrifice. When her attention had been directed to little Nelly's position, she lost not a moment in setting things right, as far as lay in her power. In fact, Miss Morton had renounced his son and an alliance with his family without a pang. Mr. Wynum was displeased with Miss Morton.

At length the day came when Cornet Wynum sailed from Southampton. His father, his aunt, and his cousins watched his ship as it left the port. Two of the ladies waved their handkerchiefs till the vessel passed out of sight ; but the third made no sign. A very young and very innocent heart, beating within a very fair little bosom, was broken that day—broken with the sharp crack that a first-love grief causes the heart of a guileless maiden.

But cheer up, little Nelly ! Hearts that the

owners believed shattered into ten thousand fragments have, strange to say, been soldered, seamed up, and made strong as ever, less liable to break, in tinkering phrase, in the seams than elsewhere. These heart-solderings are sometimes effected by the application of diamond cement; sometimes the great medicator, Time, lays on an unguent that soothes though it does not quite revivify; and sometimes, oh, joy! the hand that wounded returns, after long years, and with a magic touch heals, leaving no cicatrice.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WYNUM and her nieces returned to London from Southampton accompanied by Mr. Wynum. That gentleman himself announced his immediate departure for the North at Mrs. Archibald's evening assembly, if assembly it could be called, where were present, beside Miss Morton, only Miss Maunsell and Mr. Browne. The next day but one Mr. Wynum was to leave. He had long delayed his visit to the North, but the time was come when he could no longer defer seeing his brother; and Mr. Wynum took this opportunity of dilating on his brother's wealth; for, oddly enough, Mr. Wynum, though the son of a trader, affected to despise trade, at the same time that he boasted of the wealth of his millionaire brother.

When Miss Maunsell mentioned Cornet Wynum, and attempted a lamentation over the early death of Indian officers, Mr. Wynum cut her short by saying money was a shield against bullets and fever. His son being heir to im-

mense wealth could afford to indulge the freak of visiting India in a red coat : if he chose to remain there a few years he was free to do so. On his return, what with the military rank he would by that time have attained or purchased and the money at his command, he would be in a position to choose a wife from amongst the most aristocratic families in the land.

Miss Maunsell believing an attempt was being made to silence her, was resolved to resist, and whilst Mr. Wynum continued to address himself to Mrs. Archibald, Miss Maunsell contrived to keep up a running commentary in a minor key to the tune of bullets, yellow-fever, and tigers, all of which Mr. Wynum affected not to hear.

At a quarter to ten Mr. Wynum rose to leave. Mrs. Archibald asked if she might hope to see him again before he took his departure. He thought not. Nor Mrs. Wynum and her nieces ? He must say he believed not. Mrs. Wynum and her nieces were that day dining with a friend at Clapham, and would be engaged the following day shopping.

Mr. Wynum then proceeded to make his adieus. They were more formal and less friendly than Mrs. Archibald could have wished. When would he return ? He could not say : it depended on circumstances. The last adieu

were pronounced. Miss Maunsell cast down her eyes and looked very dignified as she gave her hand to Mr. Wynum. Mr. Browne accompanied him home. It was observed that Mr. Wynum's farewell to Margaret Morton was grave and almost cold.

"Well, really, my dear," said Miss Maunsell, after Mr. Wynum's departure, "I must say 'tis as strange a thing as I ever witnessed in my life."

"What is, Ellen?"

"What is! Well, dear, if you don't see it, 'tis all for the best, I suppose."

Mrs. Archibald looked up quickly.

"I allude, dear, to Mr. Wynum's manner. He took leave of us as if we were acquaintances of yesterday. I never saw anything like it in my life. I should like to know what it means."

"He has lately parted from his son : he may be depressed."

"Depressed! Really, dear, I'm astonished at you. Depressed! I never heard him rattle away at such a rate before in my life. I should really like to know what it means. I'm not suspicious, but I've been often told I'm too sensitive. I must say I should like to know what Mr. Wynum means."

As Mrs. Archibald made no further remark, silence prevailed till Miss Maunsell bethought

her of inquiring if Mrs. Green had arrived, and, being informed she was in waiting, hastened to leave.

Miss Maunsell might have been about half way to her own abode when Mr. Browne re-entered Mrs. Archibald's drawing-room. He sympathized with that lady on Mr. Wynum's mood, and agreed with her in saying it was well Richard and Henry had not been present.

Next morning Mr. Wynum left St. John's Terrace for the Bath Hotel, his first stage on his way to the North. On his way down Mrs. Green's staircase, he stopped short and knocked at Miss Maunsell's door. That worthy lady was not a little delighted at the sight of her visitor, who, without entering into details, or mentioning names, left Miss Maunsell under the conviction that he had been badly treated by some person or persons at Eva Terrace.

Mrs. Archibald was left in quiet. Mr. Wynum had set out for the mysterious North. His son had left for India. So passed away the remains of summer and the entire of autumn. Finally November came, and with it came chills and fogs, short days and long evenings. With it too came large fires, in which Mrs. Archibald delighted; and with it came what delighted her quite as much, profound

quiet and unbroken repose. Again the old game of whist occupied Mrs. Archibald and her friends of an evening, the performers being, besides the lady of the house, Miss Maunsell, Mr. Browne, and Henry Morton. Richard Archibald sat apart, as of old, with Margaret Morton, talking of literature or law or commercial speculations. When neither of Mrs. Archibald's nephews was present, her niece took the fourth hand at the whist-table.

Christmas came. The party assembled at Eva Terrace was quiet and happy ; very cheerful, too, for Henry Morton was endowed with irrepressible vivacity and a buoyancy of spirits capable of floating him above care and trouble, if he had any, though, sooth to say, Henry Morton had as yet experienced little contradiction in life. Knowing what would please his aunt, Mr. Morton paid Miss Maunsell an amount of attention that maintained the lady in perfect good temper. Then there was Mr. Browne, in his perennial crispy good humour, cheery as sunlight on a winter's day ; and there were also Richard Archibald and Margaret Morton, who, after recent events, could not be regarded in any other light than as persons destined to make one another happy.

Mrs. Archibald lingered over dessert till Miss

Keel arrived, who, having dined early with her invalid mother, was able to taste the national pudding, eat a few grapes, and drink a glass of wine.

“How we miss Mr. Wynum!” said Mrs. Archibald. “For several Christmas Days past he has been with us, Ellen.”

“Yes, dear, but you have your nephews this year.”

“Thank you, Miss Maunsell,” said Henry. “Aunt seems to forget me sometimes.”

“Pardon me, Henry. Remembering others does not imply forgetfulness of you.”

“Well, aunt, here’s Mr. Browne. You haven’t had him every Christmas for the last eight years. Doesn’t he compensate for the absence of Mr. Wynum?”

“When Mr. Wynum was here, Harry, I missed Mr. Browne and you; and now you’re here, I miss him.”

“Aunt, my feeling is allayed.”

“I’ve no doubt,” said Miss Maunsell, “that Mr. Wynum is passing a very happy Christmas in his brother’s house. The North is famous for hospitality. The Northern are much superior to the Southern English.”

“I’m glad,” said Henry Morton, “I’ve come from the East.”

“Oh, naughty, naughty!” and Miss Maunsell tapped his hand with the nutcrackers. “But Mr. Wynum must be happy now in the bosom of his own family, with that excellent sister-in-law, and those two pretty creatures her nieces, sweet, innocent, unassuming little pets!”

“They’re certainly a nice family,” said Mrs. Archibald, with a scarcely perceptible shade of constraint in her manner.

“May I be allowed,” said Mr. Browne, rising, “to propose a toast? Gentlemen, fill the ladies’ glasses, fill your own. Our absent friend, Mr. Wynum!”

The toast was drunk, and Mrs. Archibald, with Miss Maunsell’s consent, led the way to the drawing-room.

When Mrs. Archibald said she missed Mr. Wynum, she gave utterance spontaneously to a want that pressed at the moment on her feelings. She missed Mr. Wynum’s presence. She missed the old friend who during so many succeeding anniversaries had sat at her board on Christmas Day. She missed the man whose polished manners and high-toned breeding reminded her of the brilliant early years of her wedded life. She missed the school-fellow and college companion of her

husband, and remembered with what pleasure she had often listened to both, as they discussed some philosophic question or recalled anecdotes of their student life. Mrs. Archibald did miss Mr. Wynum, and felt sad to think their parting had been in coldness.

Christmas had been entombed with all the national honours, and the New Year, in due time, made its appearance. Mrs. Archibald hailed the New Year as the opening of a period of peace, and she looked forward to the re-establishment of the profound tranquillity that had prevailed in her household before she made the acquaintance of Cornet Wynum. In casting a retrospective glance on the harassing anxieties of the past half-year Mrs. Archibald was able to draw therefrom at least one crumb of comfort. She had received the strongest assurances of Richard Archibald's sentiments with regard to his cousin Margaret, and the project of their marriage, so dear to her heart, she now regarded as a settled question. About Margaret's feelings she entertained no doubt. The imperial dignity with which she had received the homage of Cornet Wynum, as well as that of his military friends, and the profound tranquillity with which she had observed the reverential admiration of Monsieur

Claude, gratified Mrs. Archibald exceedingly. Her niece had proved herself worthy of her family. The lofty and unostentatious generosity with which, though almost at the last moment—but the motive had not been furnished her before—she made Cornet Wynum feel he could never be more to her than a friend was an additional source of pride and satisfaction to Mrs. Archibald.

These were favourable auspices ushering in the young year, but they did not come alone. Mrs. Archibald's nephews brought her most favourable accounts of the progress their City affairs were making. Another session, and Richard would be called to the Bar. Before that time the house of Morton & Co. would be known in the City of London.

“The only thing we want,” said Henry, after he and Richard had furnished their aunt with the latest intelligence respecting their prospects, “is money. Let old Grant furnish that, and we slap into dashing business. Before a year is out my precious trustees will be able to purchase the estate; and see if our Indian house won’t be looking after us proud to claim us.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE passage of time is rarely heeded when our days are of peace and our nights of repose. Such was Mrs. Archibald's position. November had arrived, and no disturbing care had ruffled the quiet tenor of her existence for many months. It is true she had not enjoyed as much of the society of her nephews during the past half-year as she had been wont to do, but she reconciled herself to the privation by the knowledge of the labours in which they were engaged. They were working to make money, and, as they said, were obliged to be careful of their health. Both had been so over-worked that, but for occasional trips to Brighton, they would not have been able, they told their aunt, to "pull through."

November came, but its fogs and dampness were pierced by a ray of bright sunshine. A letter came from Mr. Wynam, announcing his speedy return to the South. Mrs. Archibald

was herself surprised at the profound satisfaction the intelligence afforded her. She lost no time in replying, and hoped soon to see him where he had been so missed the previous year—at her Christmas dinner-table.

The post that brought this letter to Mrs. Archibald brought one also to Mrs. Green, and one also to Miss Maunsell. Each was pleased. The pleasure of the one was of a pecuniary, that of the other of a romantic character.

Two days before Christmas Eve, Mr. Wynum arrived at St. John's Terrace. When the cab containing himself and bearing his luggage stopped at No. 4, Miss Maunsell rushed into the passage, and flung open the house-door, whilst Mrs. Green scrambled up the area steps and undid the gate.

Cordial was Miss Maunsell's greeting; and the homeless man, for a moment flinging aside the encasement of frozen conventionalities, pressed her hand in his with unaffected warmth, and his voice faltered in genuine emotion as he expressed his delight at seeing her again.

Mr. Wynum found a bright fire burning in each of his rooms. He asked if dinner were prepared as he had ordered. Mrs. Green, curtseying, said everything was ready, and Mr.

Wynum contentedly proceeded to make his toilette. Within half an hour he re-entered the sitting-room, and, seeing no preparations for dinner, rang the bell somewhat testily. Mrs. Green did not appear in answer to the summons, but Miss Maunsell did. The good lady hurried upstairs, and came puffing into the drawing-room.

“ My dear sir, pray excuse me. I ’ve taken the liberty of ordering dinner below-stairs. You ’ll dine with me to-day. You ’ll meet a couple of old friends.”

“ Miss Maunsell, you ’re too good. I didn’t expect—” Mr. Wynum glanced at his dress.

“ My dear sir, no ceremony. Just look at me.”

Mr. Wynum had already done so, and had observed that Miss Maunsell wore the blush-rose in her cap or border, as the millinery surrounding her face might properly be called; and Mr. Wynum, being appealed to, did not think he exaggerated in saying,—

“ Miss Maunsell, your toilette is perfection.”

Miss Maunsell might have blushed, she probably did ; but excitement and—let us be just—good feeling had already so heightened her colour that no accession was perceptible. She looked at her fellow-lodger, her large eyes

beaming with delight, and her mouth pursed up as if in an effort to suppress a smile of triumph, as she said,—

“Mrs. Archibald and Mr. Browne are below, and longing to see you.”

Mr. Wynum was touched to the heart. Tears, genuine tears, stood in his eyes.

“Oh, Miss Maunsell, how happy I am in having such friends! How can I ever thank you?”

He offered his arm to the lady, and led her to the head of the staircase, from which point Miss Maunsell took the lead, followed by her guest.

Mrs. Archibald advanced to meet Mr. Wynum as he entered the dining-room. The meeting was more than cordial; it was affectionate. How warmly Mr. Browne grasped his friend’s hand, and how heartily the grasp was returned! Then came forward Margaret Morton, with her honest, open-hearted smile and outstretched hand. Mr. Wynum was tempted to impress a paternal salute on her broad brow, but he resisted the inclination; it savoured too much of the old man. Mrs. Archibald’s nephews arrived in the evening, and every member of the little party seemed perfectly happy. No prandial festivities presided over

by Miss Maunsell during the previous eighteen months had had so much of a "home" aspect.

On Christmas Day the same persons assembled at Mrs. Archibald's. All were cheerful and quite at home. Mr. Wynum, the honoured guest whose presence put the climax to the honest joys of the day, responded heartily to the kindly manifestations of feeling thus evoked; and Mrs. Archibald, congratulating herself on the return of Mr. Wynum, whispered to her heart that things at Eva Terrace would now fall into their old positions.

And so they did in the main, though not exactly so in every particular. Henry Morton, though his room at Eva Terrace was always kept in readiness, no longer lived at his aunt's: he had taken chambers in a street off Piccadilly. This move added to his expenses, but it was a matter of business. He was often obliged, he said, to have fellows to dinner that he could not take to the club, because they wanted to talk of business, and he could not think of taking them to his aunt's. Henry's absence involved Richard's, and for the same reasons. Richard had not commercial affairs alone to consider; he had his law studies to carry on. So Mrs. Archibald had peace, which she desired above all things, but she felt

it was purchased at a great price, for she loved the society of her nephews. Margaret Morton missed the society of her brother and cousin ; missed the society of the latter more than she would like to say, more than she would care to acknowledge even to herself. But though separated from Richard by the tyranny of circumstances, she derived profound pleasure from feeling they were constantly associated in the same pursuits, working in the same groove ; that consequently each was continually present, and that, too, under a pleasing aspect, to the other's mind. Richard still sent his MSS. to Margaret, which she sometimes re-wrote, elaborating thoughts or condensing expression : she corrected the proofs, and finally read the article in the magazine. And all this was done with the profound and secret pleasure a high-minded woman feels in furthering the ambition of the man who has not only won her esteem, but who has openly entered the lists as a candidate for her affections. If Richard and Henry were not as constant evening visitors at their aunt's as formerly, Margaret was satisfied, and with good reason. Mrs. Archibald was forced to be content.

One evening, whilst the customary rubber was being played, Richard and Harry arrived

at Eva Terrace. Their visits had become so rare that cards were immediately laid aside. They were supposed to have much to tell, much to ask, and, naturally, much to answer. Richard Archibald, having saluted his aunt and her elderly friends, retired to the opposite end of the room, where Margaret Morton occupied her old seat, and was reading by the light of a lamp. Mrs. Archibald, after a few minutes, joined them : it was an unusual movement on her part “ ’Tis so very long, Richard, since I’ve seen you, that I wish to profit by these few moments.”

Margaret made a movement as if she would go away.

“ Don’t, Margaret, don’t,” said Richard ; “ I want to speak to you ; and, dear aunt, I want to speak to you too.”

“ Will the same communication do for both ? ” asked Margaret, smiling.

“ Yes and no,” said Richard, gaily. “ Firstly, I want to ask aunt for an interview to-morrow morning ; and, secondly, I want to tell you both that Harry and I are doing good business, —that old Grant is a great brick.”

“ I’m glad to hear it. I never expected to hear good of a money-lender.”

“ Miracles never cease ! —a starched, penu-

rious old bachelor, and, at the same time, a large-minded speculator. I must tell you, aunt, he 's greatly flattered and much obliged by your attention to his nieces. And that reminds me—Mrs. Grant is about to give a ball. You 're to be invited, and I hope, aunt, you 'll come. Poor Mrs. Grant is out of her senses with delight, and so are the girls. Old Grant is at the bottom of it. It couldn't be done without his permission. I think he 's in good humour because you seem to like his nieces. That 's my reading of the text."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Archibald, to whom the prospect of a ball afforded no pleasure.

"Yes, really. He told me the other day he wished his sister-in-law had your notions about bringing up girls. I knew what he alluded to, and laughed in my sleeve. Because, aunt, after all, your training couldn't have made Margaret what she is if the material were not there."

Margaret blushed in strong emotion, and Mrs. Archibald pressed her niece's hand—an unusual demonstration of affection on her part—as she said to Richard,—

"The good soil was there, but your uncle was the cultivator."

It was agreed that Richard should lunch next day at Eva Terrace.

"Don't say anything about it to Harry," he said, with a knowing little twinkle in his eyes. "I've some little confidences for our triangular conversation."

Mrs. Archibald slept peacefully that night.

Before the expiration of the week, her aunt told Margaret Morton she intended to give a little evening party, to which, in addition to their own immediate acquaintances, the Grant family should be invited. Mrs. Archibald explained her reasons for this step, and Margaret concurred in her aunt's views. Miss Maunsell, too, was prepared for the coming party, and succeeded in getting an invitation for her "young friend" Miss West, who was to be accompanied by her father. On the appointed evening the invited guests duly arrived at Eva Terrace. So many young people being present, and a ball looming in the distance, the lady of the house proposed dancing. Miss Keel took her place at the piano, and played a set of quadrilles. The terpsichorean performance having come to an end, and Miss Keel still continuing to play dance music, Henry Morton and Richard Archibald simultaneously seized the sisters Grant and commenced a rapid galop.

The two couples danced well. Mr. Wynum

could not see it: Mrs. Archibald did, and thought she saw something more; she also believed this “something more” was perceptible to other eyes than hers. Mr. Wynum spoke disparagingly of the galop, and of round dances in general. Mrs. Archibald remembered the time when the denouncer was one of the most graceful waltzers in his circle.

It was late in the evening when Mr. Grant arrived. Having paid his respects to the lady of the house, and taken a proffered seat beside her, he said,—

“ It seems to me, madam, that people lie in wait for me whenever I have an appointment. I would have been here an hour ago, but that a gentleman unexpectedly called on me. He wants 30,000*l.*, and modestly asks me to get him the money. People think, I do believe, that I carry thousands about in my waistcoat pocket.”

“ Do I know the gentleman that wants the 30,000*l.* ? ” asked Mr. Archibald.

“ I think so.”

“ Mr. Monckton ? ”

“ Yes. Monckton is only a kind of agent. He knows of a case where I financed a powerful firm that got into difficulties. I pulled ‘em

through. Monckton wants to finance another house."

"Will you do it?"

Mr. Grant bent his head till his chin touched his breast; he then slowly recovered his position and smiled. The smile made visible the deep furrows that lined his face from cheek-bone to chin.

"Madam," he said, turning to Mrs. Archibald, "I'm a weak man, but I possess an advantage over the generality of weak men; I know my own weakness. I've promised Monckton, but I told him frankly I could do nothing for him till I had finished an affair I have in hand. That's the business of my young friends, your nephews. I'll see them fairly floated before I lend my hand or my head to any other transaction. I'm determined on it. Archibald, I'm keeping you: I know you like dancing."

Mr. Grant seemed to know a great deal about Mr. Archibald's tastes, and Mr. Archibald seemed to know a great deal about the Grant family in general. Mrs. Archibald became aware, even whilst playing her rubber, that Richard knew as well as Harry the name of every song the Misses Grant sang particularly well, and the name of every piece of music they played

with especial execution. She sincerely wished the money transactions with old Grant brought to a favourable close, and the acquaintance between the families brought to an end.

Everything was very pleasant at supper. There was singing, and there was agreeable conversation; there were good viands and excellent wines. When Mrs. Archibald rose from the supper-table, she requested Mr. Wynum to do the honours for the gentlemen. This gave the ladies a little while to themselves in the drawing-room, an interval during which the elders indulged in the lassitude natural to their time of life, whilst the younger amused themselves at the opposite end of the room as best they could.

Marie and Julie Grant were pressing Miss Morton to play a duet; she had only played once during the evening. In order to decide the question, Julie ran across the room, and, twining her arms round Miss Keel's waist, asked her coaxingly to give assistance. Miss Keel seated herself at the piano, selected a duet that Margaret could play, and touched a few preliminary chords. Margaret was about to commence when Richard and Henry entered the room.

“Come, come,” said Miss Keel, “let us begin.”

"No ; I don't think they would care to hear me."

Miss Keel looked as though she did not understand the words ; but at the same moment Mr. Morton stepped up.

"Miss Keel, a polka."

He was obeyed ; and, taking Marie Grant by the waist, the pair whirled through the room, followed by Mr. Archibald and Julie Grant. Round again and again the two couples swept, whilst the gentlemen who had left the supper-table last, and had just entered the drawing-room, were skirting along the wall, endeavouring to reach a seat without coming in contact with the flying dancers.

Mr. Grant was at length able to pilot his way to where Mrs. Archibald and Mrs. Grant were sitting. He smiled deprecatingly, and said something about young people being young people ; and Mrs. Grant, who was now, in her own opinion, on terms of familiarity with Mrs. Archibald, declared she never met two such young men for polkas : morning, noon, or night, 'twas all the same to them ; and when Marie was playing and Julie polkaing with Mr. Archibald, and Mr. Morton wanted a partner, he would take her round the waist and pull her about. The cloud that in the

early part of the evening had cast a shadow on Mrs. Archibald's brow returned now, and with a darker shade.

The polka was finished, and the performers having taken breath for a few minutes, a galop was initiated and gone through with like vivacity and skill. Mrs. Grant, wholly engrossed with her dear daughters, moved to a part of the room where she could have a better view of their terpsichorean performance. Mr. Grant took this opportunity to tell Mrs. Archibald that his sister-in-law was one of the best of women ; not, perhaps, brilliant in intellect, but the warmest, honestest, and simplest heart in the world.

Whilst Mr. Grant was making this communication so full of family affection, the galoping was still going on, and Mrs. Archibald was at the same time listening to the speaker and observing the dancers. Margaret Morton, too, was observing them, as she stood in an angle between the two compartments of the drawing-room. The dance had ceased, Richard Archibald had conducted his partner to a seat beside her mother, had procured her refreshment, had uttered some words of compliment to mother and daughter, and was about to rejoin old Grant and his aunt, when he came to where

Margaret Morton was standing. He stopped suddenly.

“ Margaret, a polka ?”

“ No, thank you.” And Margaret coloured violently.

“ You can polka, I know.”

“ Yes ; but I don’t care to at present.”

“ I’m dreadfully warm. I want to speak to aunt.”

And Richard moved off.

Margaret Morton was now very pale. Her heart beat with an emotion strong and painful, such as she had never known before. Was it anger ? Was it jealousy ? Was it insulted pride ? Or was it the sudden volcanic outburst of a tempestuous combination, long smouldering unsuspected in her heart, and to which the chameleon-shaded name of love is given ? She did not know. She was so over-powered by her sensations that she withdrew to a chair placed deeper in the angle than where she stood, and there, forgetful of all around, sat stunned and wondering. She was to herself an object of wonder. She, long trained to habits of self-introspection—she who had been taught to believe a knowledge of her own mind the highest science—how could she be so shaken, and what had done

it? She had hitherto been able to render an account to herself of her acts and feelings ; but how was it now ? Two minutes' experience had overthrown the belief of her past life.

Miss Morton was awakened from her reverie by Julie Grant, who, putting an arm affectionately round her, asked if she was ill. Margaret said "No," and added truly she was stunned.

"Oh, I know what it is !" said Julie. "The polkaing and galoping were too much for you. You're too good to dance round dances."

"If they were bad," said Margaret, smiling, "I suppose you wouldn't dance 'em."

Mrs. Archibald was walking through the rooms, leaning on the arm of her nephew, Richard.

"Now, aunt," said Mr. Archibald, stopping short, and laughing, "I've to complain of Margaret. She has refused me all this evening. I asked her to polka ; she refused. Will she always refuse ?"

"I hope not." And Mrs. Archibald smiled.

"Well, Margaret, will you dance a quadrille ?"

"With pleasure."

"Now, aunt," cried Henry Morton, hurry-

ing forward, "you promised to dance; and you'll dance with me."

"Aunt, you're trapped; you can't get out." And Richard laughed.

That night marked for Margaret Morton an epoch remarkable in the life of every individual, man and woman, who has loved and suffered. It was her first sleepless night because of heart-ache. It was the first night of her life she had lain awake analyzing, or trying to analyze, a tumult raging in her breast. She felt as one who had been wronged. But what was the wrong? She felt outraged; but in what did the offence consist? Then she tried to examine quietly her grounds for complaint. Richard Archibald had danced with Julie Grant, and his tone as well as that of her brother showed the easy familiarity that subsisted between them and the Misses Grant. But, on the other hand, the Grants were *facile*; it was their style. Was she jealous? Margaret Morton's lip curled in scorn.

But this was only one view of the case. Richard and Henry were intimate at Mrs. Grant's, and might naturally be expected to show much attention to her daughters when at Mrs. Archibald's. And she had refused Richard when he asked her to polka. The

recollection sent the blood rushing to her head, fearing her refusal might be construed into a manifestation of feeling. After all, there might be nothing in Richard's conduct. She was so little accustomed to meeting strangers. She might easily be mistaken.

In this way did Margaret Morton reason with herself through long hours of the night; in this way did she try to unravel the tangled skein of her thoughts. She finally came to the conclusion that there was nothing in what had passed; but, though she said so and laughed, she felt sore at heart. Margaret Morton was like one who, at night, has been momentarily terrified by the apparition of a phantom, and who, when morning comes, jests in the sunlight at the vain fancy, but all the while carries the internal conviction of having received a supernatural visitant or warning.

The following evening Mr. Wynum, Miss Maunsell, and Mr. Browne constituted Mrs. Archibald's whist party. All were more or less fatigued by the exertions of the previous evening. The rubber did not proceed with the customary vivacity. There was often a long pause between the deals. Finally the cards lay untouched on the table, and the players chatted languidly.

Margaret Morton did not occupy her usual place beside the reading-lamp. She passed the evening in the darkened portion of the drawing-room, behind the folding doors, and there, seated on a couch, remained sunk in profound meditation.

"You are fatigued, dear," said Miss Maunsell, looking affectionately at Mrs. Archibald; "the exertion of last night was too much for you."

Before the expiration of the week, Mrs. Archibald's nephews, accompanied by old Grant, called one evening at Eva Terrace. This visit was the result of previous arrangement, business during the day being so pressing that the gentlemen could not tear themselves from the City. Richard Archibald had a long chat with his cousin Margaret. He told her he had made the acquaintance of several literary men, and would shortly introduce some of them to her. His tone was as of old, so was the matter of his conversation, and Margaret Morton's heart beat tranquilly, and her thoughts ran clearly as of yore. That night, in the secrecy of her chamber, she reproached herself with having wronged Richard, in supposing he could undervalue her.

Mrs. Archibald had hoped to escape the labour of going to Mrs. Grant's ball; but, as the

time drew near, she found escape impossible. She had hoped to install Miss Maunsell in the post of chaperon to Margaret, whilst she remained quietly at home. The evening party she gave had been got up as preliminary to such arrangement; but, between the date of that party and the coming off of the ball, Mrs. Archibald found herself on terms with a member of the Grant family that made her deem it wise to sacrifice her love of ease. The member who exercised this experience over Mrs. Archibald was old Grant, who, in company with Richard Archibald, had had several private morning interviews with Mrs. Archibald, and with whom she now seemed to have a confidential understanding on many matters.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. GREEN had been for some months pursuing inquiries and carrying on investigations in a certain direction with the silent, patient assiduity which characterizes philosophic minds. She had carefully considered the circumstances connected with Cornet Wynum's visit to London, his subsequent departure for India, his father's prolonged stay in the North, and his retreat from that point of the compass in an opposite direction. She had patiently pondered over these data, striving to determine the precise terms existing between the members of the Wynum family residing in the north, south, and east. In pursuing this laudable object, Mrs. Green had often found her progress arrested by external disturbing forces for which she could not account. When she attempted an evening visit to Clifton, instead of being received with open arms, as was once the case,

she was met by closed doors, from behind which Mrs. Clifton informed her she was up to her eyes in business, and "not fit to be seen." Mrs. Green could for once accept such an excuse, but the repetition shook her faith. To believe that the orderly Clifton, who presided over the orderly household of Mrs. Archibald, could be, evening after evening, during a period of more than two months, "not fit to be seen" would be absolutely monstrous. Mrs. Green's exclusion from the basement of No. 32 must be ascribable to other causes. She met Mary, "by chance," several times, but could obtain no satisfactory solution of her difficulty. Mary always said Mrs. Clifton was quite well, and added that she was always very busy now of an evening, but the nature of the occupation Mary carefully refrained from mentioning. The discreet housemaid, however, whilst refusing direct information, was unable to suppress certain slight indications that set Mrs. Green "a-thinking." So, after due reflection, she arrived at the conviction there was something going on at Eva Terrace, to which, as yet, she had no clue.

It happened to Mrs. Green as it has often happened to other philosophic inquirers, who, whilst examining one series of phenomena with

a view of ascertaining truths supposed to be connected therewith, have fallen in with another series wholly unconnected with the object of their actual pursuit, and which have led to the discovery of facts whose existence was not even suspected by these same inquirers.

Mrs. Green had wished to arrive at a correct knowledge of the relations existing between the different members of the Wynum family, and their general relations with Mrs. Archibald's household; and Mrs. Green, whilst partially frustrated in this attempt, became aware that Clifton's refusal to receive her of an evening was not in reality attributable to that lady's not being fit to be seen, but rather because she was fitted up to be seen by one very different from her female neighbour.

Mrs. Green had adjusted her telescope to observe some of the primary planets, but disturbing forces, for which she could not account, having falsified her calculations, she found it advisable to lower her glass and turn her gaze on Clifton's circumscribed orbit. Her wisdom met its reward. She discovered that the true cause of her exclusion from the basement story of Eva Terrace was the presence of a male visitor, and she further discovered that this male visitor wore a red coat.

Too philosophic to come to a hasty conclusion, Mrs. Green did not forget in making her calculations that Dumpling's step-father was a soldier, but then Mrs. Clifton need not dress up as Mrs. Green ascertained by personal observation she did to meet a brother-in-law. The fact was patent. Mrs. Clifton was invisible to her old gossip, because of the recurring visits of this military stranger.

Satisfied with the knowledge of these facts, Mrs. Green suspended further inquiries. She would allow events to ripen after their own fashion.

Mrs. Green was not the only person whose attention was directed to an inmate of Eva Terrace. Mr. Wynum, on his return from the North, had observed a change in Mrs. Archibald's appearance. It is true, the colour on the lady's cheek was as soft and delicately bright as ever; it was also true that her pretty French caps maintained their ancient repute for tasteful arrangement; but Mr. Wynum's experienced eye detected symptoms which neither cosmetic nor millinery art could wholly conceal. Mrs. Archibald's cheek had become hollow, and her eye looked larger and brighter than of old. Mr. Wynum remarked on these changes to Miss Maunsell, but was met as that lady always

met observations on her friend's health, when they did not originate with herself. Mrs. Archibald was as well as she had been for years. It was her manner; she was constitutionally averse to exertion, but she still took her daily walk in the garden when the weather permitted. She took as much interest in everything around as she had done since her husband's death. Winter always tried her, spring still more; but summer would set her right again.

Mr. Wynum was silenced, but not convinced. Miss Maunsell, like many other sagacious persons, would sometimes take a hint from the opponent whose views she had combated, and act thereon without acknowledgment. She did so in the present instance. Winter was wearing away, spring was not far off, and Miss Maunsell saw that her friend, in addition to her customary annual bad symptoms, exhibited others of a very distressing character. She coughed much, especially at night, and her cough was low and soft. Mrs. Archibald said it was not distressing; she believed she had taken cold. For this cold and this cough an evening at the theatre was blamed by some, a walk in the garden by others, a visit to the highly heated green-house

by a third ; and the cold and the cough having been thus satisfactorily traced to so many sources, friendly anxiety was allayed. Clifton was a good nurse, and knew how to make syrups and tizans. Mrs. Grant's ball came off. Mr. Wynum and Mr. Browne had been invited, but sent apologies : on the night of the ball both went to the theatre.

About noon on the day but one succeeding the ball, Mr. Wynum made a visit to his fellow-lodger.

" Miss Maunsell," he said, " I 'm come in person to apologize for the disturbance I fear I occasioned last night. Our friend Browne took me off to the theatre again. I shall not be so ungenerous as to throw blame on him ; but I hope I didn't disturb you—at least not very much."

" Not at all, my dear sir ; not by any means. I 'm so glad you 've been enjoying yourself."

" You too, Miss Maunsell, have been dissipating. How did the ball go off ? "

" Well, really I can hardly say. I suppose I 'm too old to enjoy such things."

" On the contrary, Miss Maunsell, experience makes us better judges. What kind of company had you ? "

" Very mixed, sir—very mixed, I should

say." And Miss Maunsell cast down her eyes.

" You and I, Miss Maunsell, are rather exclusive. We can't help that: 'tis the result of habit."

" Very true, sir—very true."

" But how philosophic our friend Mrs. Archibald has become! She, so fastidious and so delicate in health, steps boldly out, and, to promote the pecuniary interests of her family, actually sacrifices her feelings. 'Tis a wonderful example of woman's devotedness."

" An example I must confess, my dear sir, I could never imitate."

" And how did our young friend, Miss Maunsell, enjoy herself?" asked Mr. Wynum. " The company, from what you say, appears to have been very mixed; but Miss Morton had her brother and cousin as partners."

" Well, yes, she had, and she had not. A brother I don't mind, but still, under the circumstances, Henry Morton ought to have paid more attention to his sister, and not left her to dance so much with strangers."

" But there was her cousin, Mr. Archibald."

" Yes, he certainly was there; but all I can say is, I'm astonished. I may be mistaken; I hope I am. I sincerely hope our friend, Mrs.

Archibald will not have a disappointment from that quarter."

"Mr. Archibald surely danced with his cousin?"

"Oh, certainly, he danced with her, but not with the persistency, not with the constancy, I should have expected. I may be mistaken, I may be quite wrong, but I must say I think it strange."

Mr. Wynum left Miss Maunsell, his curiosity gratified on every point.

CHAPTER X.

ON the borders of Pimlico, at one of the points where that district and Chelsea touch, lived Mrs. Grant. Her house was small. It was in the immediate vicinity of St. Barnabas' Church, and every sound intoned by the frequent-tolling bells of that sanctuary struck audibly on the ears of each inhabitant of Mrs. Grant's home.

On the morning when we in our professional capacity visit Mrs. Grant, we find in the drawing-room one visitor. It is early in the day, too early for a fashionable call; none but familiar frequenters of a house could be found seated with the family at such an hour. The name of this very early visitor is Mr. Richard Archibald. Mrs. Grant is seated before a table, on which stands a large basket filled with needlework of the homeliest kind. In this spacious receptacle are to be seen recently washed stockings, pieces of old linen, and articles of various shapes.

“Julie,” said Mrs. Grant, addressing one of her daughters, “you’re idling dreadfully. You can talk to Mr. Archibald and work at the same time. Marie and I talk and still go on working.”

“Yes, ma, I know that. But I want to ask Mr. Archibald something, and he’s so stupid; I can’t get an answer from him.”

“You haven’t asked any questions yet,” said the gentleman.

“No; but I mean to.”

Julie was half extended on a *chaise longue*, her arm resting on the pillow, and the hand of the same arm supporting her head. Mr. Archibald’s chair was placed close to the head of the *chaise longue*; he had the advantage of Julie, he could look down on her. Julie could look up at him. She did so as she said,—

“You don’t like me.”

“How do you know?”

“I know it. You’d like me if I were as clever as Miss Morton.”

“You’d be too clever, then.”

“Ma,” said Julie, raising her voice—her conversation with Mr. Archibald was carried on in a low tone—“is Miss Morton rich?”

“I don’t know, dear; I suppose she is.”

“Why do you suppose so, ma?”

"Well, dear, I suppose a young lady must be rich who can afford to spend her time reading and writing and doing nothing else."

"I wish I were rich, and could spend all my time reading and writing."

As Julie gave utterance to this wish, her large dark eyes were turned upwards to Richard Archibald's face.

"Julie," said her mother, "I do wish you 'd take up some work. Mr. Archibald, you 're making her quite an idler."

"I 'll come presently, ma ; but I 've another question to ask."

"Well, dear, be quick with your question."

"Well, ma, tell me how much money has Miss Morton ?"

"I really don't know, dear."

"But guess, ma, guess."

"Oh, dear ! I can't guess. I suppose she has 10,000*l.* at least."

"Why 10,000*l.*, ma ?"

"Because, my dear, no young lady with less could afford to spend so idle a life. But remember, Julie, you 're to be a poor man's wife. Come and darn these socks of uncle's. Come, dear, come."

The large, dark eyes were again turned

softly on Mr. Archibald's, and a voice murmured,—

“I'm to be a poor man's wife.”

“I hope not,” was the answer to that strong appeal.

After a few minutes passed in the silent intercourse of looks, Julie sprang from the sofa, and, running to her mother, caught her round the neck.

“Dear, darling, lovey ma! will you grant your poor child one request?”

“Now, don't smother me, don't.”

“But, will you, ma, will you?”

“I suppose I must.”

“One little song, and one little polka, and then I go to work.”

“Well, dear, I suppose I must.”

Julie tripped off to the piano, and sang an expressive French ballad, whilst Richard Archibald listened and looked. Having finished her song, Julie jumped from the piano-stool, ran up to her sister, caught her round the waist, and began to whirl her about the room.

“Oh, you madcap!” said her mother.

“But I can't dance,” cried Julie, suddenly recollecting herself, “without music.”

She placed her sister at the piano. Marie

commenced to play a polka, and Julie danced round. She was not long without a partner. When Julie and Mr. Archibald, quite breathless, sank on the sofa, Mrs. Grant declared she did not know which was the worst. At the same time, she informed Julie she should make up for the neglected work in the evening. Julie whispered softly to Mr. Archibald,—

“ You come back in the evening, and I’ll get out of the scrape. And bring Mr. Morton. Marie will be jealous if he don’t come.”

And Julie laughed, and pinched her sister, and her mother called her “ silly girl,” and Mr. Archibald, who was now standing leave-taking, smiled and promised to tell Mr. Morton how much he was wished for, and to bring him in the evening.

Then there was a good deal of badinage between the sisters. Marie retorted on Julie, coupling her name with Mr. Archibald’s, and Julie turned away her head and pouted and looked as though she were about to cry, and called her sister a “ cruel saucy thing.” Then the mother interfered, and declared she had never known her daughters to say a cross word to one another before they knew Mr. Archi-

bald and Mr. Morton, and said if there was any more of it she should tell uncle Grant, and he would take his friends to his own house, and they should not see them any more. This appalling threat terrified the young ladies, who conjointly flung themselves on their mother's neck, begging she would not tell uncle Grant. Then there was much kissing and embracing, and Mr. Archibald was requested not to say a word to uncle Grant, which he promised, and went away, thinking how attractive Mrs. Grant's daughters were in their artless ways.

About the end of June Mrs. Grant found her daughter Marie not quite so strong as she could wish. Uncle Grant became uncomfortable, and ordered Mrs. Grant to pack up at once and take her daughters to Hastings. "There never was such a man," Mrs. Grant declared, "when anything was the matter with his nieces."

Contemporaneously with Mrs. Grant's retirement from town Mrs. Archibald's nephews resumed their evening visits at Eva Terrace. Richard Archibald was very attentive to his aunt. He spent the greater part of the evening beside her couch, was much concerned about her cough, gave her abundant information with regard to the City business in which

he and Henry were concerned, and showed her that with old Grant's assistance the new house of Morton and Archibald would one day rival the old Indian firms.

Whilst Richard Archibald talked so with his aunt, Henry Morton conversed with Miss Maunsell, amusing her with anecdotes, either genuine or invented, of city life; and Mr. Wynum, with Mr. Browne, joined in. Sometimes, when the gas was lighted, and the blinds drawn down, the four latter got up a rubber of whist. Henry Morton was ready for anything, and overflowing with facetiousness and good temper. As may be supposed, the strict rules of whist were not observed, and Mrs. Archibald and her nephew Richard were often tempted to inquire the cause of the merry disputation.

At length Mrs. Archibald would say to her nephew,—

“ My dear Richard, I 've held you too long in bondage,—I know you 're anxious to talk with Margaret ”; or “ Margaret has read your last article to me,—I 'm greatly pleased. I cannot say if Margaret is quite satisfied; I think she has something to say to you about it.”

What a contrast to Mrs. Archibald's line of

action in past times! Did Richard Archibald note the difference?

All this time Margaret Morton sat in her customary place apart, near the reading-lamp. Her eyes were fixed on a book, but it did not escape Mr. Wynum's observation that she did not turn a page. She waited and waited, anxious and restless, though externally tranquil, and when Richard Archibald moved from his place her heart beat; and when he took a seat beside her, a fluttering of the heart and change of colour bore evidence to her emotion. But before the evidence could be noted down the symptoms had subsided. As the conversation progressed Margaret became all her former self again. Were the topics the ordinary gossip of the day, she was witty and humorous, but never bitter. When Richard introduced the never-ending theme of his articles and his book, Margaret spoke with a knowledge that showed she had been studying the subjects touched on with deep attention.

During these conversations Margaret was always happy. When the topic was of a light and superficial character, the cousins stimulated each other to humorous remarks, and laughed in unison. When serious matters were discussed, and Richard often said, "That's an

excellent idea," or "That's a capital hint," and took out his pencil to make a note, and when Margaret honestly and modestly mentioned the author in whose pages she had found the thought, and when Richard, in closing his note-book, said, "Well, Margaret, there's not another girl like you in England," Margaret blushed in pride and triumph.

But when Richard left and Margaret was alone in her chamber, that which had given her pleasure became a source of pain. If Richard's admiration was expressed with an openness he had never before ventured on, it seemed as the result of a comparison drawn in his own mind, and looked more like the out-spring of his reason than the spontaneous flow of his affections. Then Margaret became depressed and restless, and a sleepless night supervened.

On the morrow of Richard's visits Mrs. Archibald was now in the habit of asking Margaret of what she and her cousin had been talking on the previous evening. She asked minute particulars, and inquired about looks and words and tones. This inquisitiveness on the part of her aunt added to Margaret's nervous restlessness.

CHAPTER XI.

“I **REALLY** don’t know,” said Mrs. Archibald one evening to Miss Maunsell, “how Margaret contrives to get through all she has undertaken. Since Clifton left, she has managed the house. She has got Dumpling into an orphanage : her foolish aunt seems to have forgotten the poor child. And though Margaret has undertaken so many new duties, she reads and practises as much as before.”

“Well, dear, she’s your own rearing. But I do wish I could persuade you to try a change of air. Why not go to Brighton? ’Twould serve your cough. Madame Charleroi is there, and has Miss West on a visit. The Grants are there. That would be no inducement, I know : still a change would serve you.”

“No, Ellen, no change of air would serve me. I feel miserable.”

Whilst this colloquy was being held in the

drawing-room, Miss Morton was seated in the library, giving orders to the cook. A ring was heard at the outer gate, and presently the servant entered and laid two letters on the table. One was addressed to Miss Morton ; the other to her aunt. Both addresses were in the same handwriting ; both bore the Brighton post-mark. Miss Morton, when at leisure, opened the envelope bearing her name. Within was another envelope, from which she drew two cards. They were wedding-cards. On one was engraved “Mr. Archibald” ; on the other, “Mrs. Archibald.” Margaret Morton looked and looked again, and, finally, stared until the letters faded from before her eyes ; and all the while what she saw conveyed no idea to her mind. Her intellect was dazed ; her powers of perception were deadened. Some time elapsed before she was sufficiently recovered to think, and her first thought was that these wedding-cards were an impudent joke. She lifted the flap of the inner envelope, and saw the name, “Julie Grant.” Still these cards represented no fact ; still she thought them an insolent jest. But the thought was hazy and dim ; it was the dreamy effort of faculties suddenly benumbed. Half an hour passed, and Margaret Morton believed Richard Archibald was married. As yet

she had only recognized the isolated fact ; the many consequences involved did not present themselves. Another half-hour passed, marked by the striking of the house clock. Margaret Morton was surprised : it seemed but as a moment since she had opened the envelope ; still, there she sat in an easy-chair, with the cards lying in her lap, close by the hand from which they had dropped. Slowly, very slowly, she recovered from the effects of the stunning blow, and then, true to her generous nature, her first thought was of her aunt. How would she, in her feeble state, bear the blow ? The nephew she had so loved, so respected, of whom she was so proud, had disappointed her, —had degraded himself by a low connexion, and had confounded the many hopes she had placed in him.

But how tell her aunt, and when ? Then a sharp pang shot through Margaret's heart as she thought of Miss Maunsell, of Mr. Wynum, and of Mr. Browne. How could she meet them ? How humiliating would be her position in their eyes ! Rejected by Richard Archibald, and for whom ?

These thoughts, cruel as a scourging with nettles, stung her brain into activity, and, as she pictured the figure she must henceforth

make amongst her friends and acquaintances, a wild tumult rose in her breast. The finger of scorn may be pointed at her, or the more insulting words of pity coupled with her name. Completely overcome, Margaret Morton folded her arms on the table, and rested her head on them. Her long-cherished aspirations, after philosophic self-command, came at length to her aid. She suddenly lifted her head, and thought again of her aunt. Miss Maunsell, too, would receive wedding-cards, and might abruptly blurt out the dreaded intelligence to Mrs. Archibald ; or Mr. Wynum or Mr. Browne, taking for granted that she knew of her nephew's marriage, might unadvisedly allude to it. But, remembering that Miss Maunsell was then sitting with her aunt, she felt assured that for the moment nothing was to be feared from that quarter. As to Messrs. Wynum and Browne, they had dined at the Army and Navy Club with an old school-fellow, and had promised to join the whist-party before nine. So far all was safe ; and Margaret, putting the wedding-cards and envelopes in her pocket, went up to the drawing-room. There she found her aunt and Miss Maunsell playing cribbage. Mrs. Archibald told her niece she feared her housekeeping

duties occupied a great deal of her time. Margaret smiled, and expressed an apprehension that she was slow, perhaps dull.

Margaret Morton replied to her aunt's remarks pleasantly, even cheerfully, and preserved the same tone in speaking with Mr. Wynum and Mr. Browne. But when the elderly people were seated at whist, and Margaret took her place by the reading-lamp, the strange feeling experienced in the library, and partly banished by the effort of a strong will, returned. She felt as if walking on air; her head was light, her senses confused. And over all this prevailed the effort to suppress, not alone any external manifestation of feeling, but the cropping up within of any germ of sentiment that might suddenly rise to a giant height. A woman of weak mind or weak nerves would have poured herself out in tears, flung herself on the bosom of some female friend, and sobbed aloud. But Margaret Morton was not weak of mind or nerves, and kept her seat steadily, through the evening, beside the lamp, though she did not read. At half-past ten her aunt called her to the other end of the room. The rubber was finished, and the gentlemen were entertaining the ladies with club news and the gossip of the day.

Sandwiches and wine were brought : a light supper had become an institution at Eva Terrace. Mrs. Archibald, now sleeping through the greater part of the day, was in no hurry to retire at night. At length the party broke up. Miss Maunsell walked home, accompanied by Mr. Wynum. In the presence of a clear-seen and fast-approaching woe she had flung aside her old-maidish scruples.

Margaret Morton bade her aunt good-night, and, leaving her to the care of her maid, retired to her own room. What a night ensued for her ! At five o'clock, on a dark November morning, she undressed and went to bed. She woke at eight, with a sense of desolation and grief on her mind, for which she could not at first account ; but, soon recalling what had occurred, and the task she had set herself, she rose. At nine, she entered the library, where she found Mr. Browne reading the *Times*. She shuddered ; she had overlooked that possible source of information. But Mr. Browne said nothing to alarm ; so Margaret concluded that either her cousin's marriage was not amongst the announcements, or else that Mr. Browne had overlooked it.

Mrs. Archibald was rather better that morning. Margaret, as was now her wont, had been to

see her aunt early, to ascertain that she had had her cup of coffee. The communication of a verbal bulletin to Mr. Browne was accompanied by a hope he would dine with them: Mrs. Archibald had something particular to say. Mr. Browne consented, remarking he was become quite an inmate of Eva Terrace.

Margaret returned to her aunt's room, and seating herself at the head of the bed, so that her face was partly concealed by the curtain, began,—

“Aunt, I've some news for you.”

“What is it, my dear? Not bad, I hope.”

“No, not bad, but very strange.”

“About whom, or what?”

“About Richard.”

“Has he lost more money?” And Mrs. Archibald half rose in her bed.

“It's nothing about money. 'Tis something much pleasanter.”

Margaret made a futile effort to speak cheerfully. Mrs. Archibald pulled back the curtain and fixed her eyes—so large and hollow, contrasting strongly with her sallow morning cheeks—on her niece.

“Dear aunt, 'tis nothing to be frightened at. He's married.”

Margaret tried to smile, but her voice sank,

and she cast down her eyes. Mrs. Archibald leaned back on her pillow. After a short silence she said,—

“I needn’t ask to whom?”

“To Julie Grant.”

Mrs. Archibald sighed deeply and turned away. She remained so long without speaking, that Margaret became alarmed. She went round to the other side of the bed. Mrs. Archibald was gazing steadily at the opposite wall. She looked at her niece.

“Margaret,” she said, “tell Somers I shan’t want her for an hour. I wish to rest.”

Margaret left the room. She was profoundly touched by her aunt’s sufferings, for suffering she knew her present state of mind to be. Within an hour she was summoned to the drawing-room where she found Mrs. Archibald lying on a couch. She placed herself so that her aunt could not see her face.

“Margaret, how did you learn this painful news?”

“Cards came last night.”

“Oh, you knew it last night?”

“Yes.”

“You spared me a dreadful night. I’ve a great deal to say to you, Margaret, and I scarcely know where to begin. Richard has

disappointed my dearest hopes, and has overthrown his uncle's work. My dear girl,"—Mrs. Archibald stretched out her hand, and Margaret was obliged, in taking it, to come a little more forward,—“I could almost say, but I shrink from such an assertion—I could almost say Richard has deceived me.”

Margaret remained silent.

“ Passing over subjects which, as women of refined feeling, we shrink from speaking of, we must think of material concerns. Margaret, I feel I've wronged you.”

“ Wronged me, aunt? Impossible! I had nothing to be wronged of. You've been a kind mother to me since I lost my own.”

Tears flowed down Margaret's cheeks, not because of her mother, of whom she had no recollection, but because of a sense of desolation and abandonment, and because her nerves were shaken by the shock she had received and the sleepless, tempestuous night she had passed.

“ Don't unnerve me, Margaret,” said her aunt. “ I feel it a duty to explain some things to you, and I wish to do so calmly.”

Margaret wiped her eyes, and pressed her aunt's hands. Mrs. Archibald went on,—

“ My income is one thousand pounds a year,

inherited from your uncle. At my death it goes to Richard, with everything in this house, except a few personal articles."

"Oh, aunt! I don't care for money."

"I know that, Margaret, and I'm sorry for it. You've been taught to despise money, unfortunately; but if you should come to want? The thought terrifies me. Let me continue, my dear, and tell what I have done. Your dear uncle loved you as his own child. He loved you much more than he loved Richard, his nephew; and incomparably beyond Henry. When you were about eight years of age you began to take a great hold on your uncle's affections. He then formed the design of every year putting by a certain sum, which was to be your dowry. This he faithfully did. You remember my last visit to Brighton?"

Margaret sobbed hysterically, but shed no tear.

"Don't, Margaret! don't, my dear! It shakes me."

Mrs. Archibald paused, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I returned from Brighton alone. Your uncle's last injunction to me, Margaret, was to guard your interests, to put no constraint on

your affections, and to continue adding to the little fund he had commenced for you. I did so. At one time your uncle and I lived in a circle where our income was very small, compared with that of some of the persons with whom we associated. We had no children, and to meet our expenses we drew on our capital ; that is to say, we spent my dowry and some ready money which your uncle inherited under his grandmother's will. We lost a great deal by Gerald Archibald. Your uncle accepted bills for him, which Gerald was not able to meet when they fell due, and your uncle had to take them up. This, added to our extra expenditure, reduced our reserve fund to one thousand pounds. Your uncle made that the nucleus of your dowry-fund. I followed his instructions ; I added to it every year. Living quietly, as we have done since we lost your dear uncle, I have been able to put aside more than in former years. I gave up my carriage, and kept no man-servant. As you grew up, Margaret, and I saw you become all your uncle wished you to be, and as I saw Richard appreciate you, I felt a double pleasure in economizing. Our faithful friend, Mr. Browne, knew of this little fund. He managed that as he has managed all our affairs for years.

Now, Margaret, comes the unpleasant part. You remember Richard and that man he calls old Grant coming here several mornings to see me. On the first visit, they wanted me to accept bills for 200*l.*, which they promised to take up when due. I knew what it was to accept bills. Gerald Archibald let me into that secret. Your dear uncle had made a solemn resolve never to accept a bill again, after his brother's affair. In his last illness he asked me to make a similar promise, and I did. When Richard asked me to accept a bill, I told him frankly I could not, but I offered to lend the money. The offer was accepted; I lent the money, and it was repaid. I lent again and again, always being repaid. But, in the course of these private conversations, Richard discovered I had a fund, of whose existence he had been previously ignorant. Finally old Grant laid before me precious schemes by which Richard and Henry could become rich, if they had only capital. Margaret, I was over-persuaded. I allowed Richard to draw the 4,000*l.* I told him the purpose for which your uncle had created that fund: I told him the money was intended for you. But, Margaret, in promoting Richard's interests, I thought I was consulting

yours. He gave me to understand he thought so too. Margaret, I feel I've done wrong. I ought not to have touched that money. I ask your pardon."

Margaret rose from her chair, and walked to the end of the couch, then, turning, she faced her aunt, advanced a few steps, and fell on her knees.

"Aunt, I beg your pardon. I've wronged you dreadfully. I never thought you cared so for me; I never believed you loved me so. And uncle, dear, dear uncle!"

Margaret leaned her head against the pillow of the couch and wept bitterly.

"My dear child, don't! You unnerve me dreadfully."

"Dear aunt, forgive me. If you knew what a dreadful night I've passed, how hot my brain is, and how sore my heart—"

She stopped short, rose from her knees; again took her seat on the chair, and said quietly—

"Aunt, forgive me. I'm very selfish to forget you."

Mrs. Archibald took her niece's hand.

"Margaret, we belong to a family where the women have always been remarkable for their pride as well as their virtue. This is a

great trial. We've been deceived. We must hide the wound."

The aunt and niece understood one another. The interclasped hands, pressed in a close squeeze, sealed a silent compact.

"I don't know," said Margaret, "how I shall meet Miss Maunsell."

"I've thought of that. Immediately after lunch, you go in to Miss Keel and remain with her a few hours. I'll send for Ellen, and before dinner she'll have said all she has to say. And now we'll have lunch at once."

Before lunch, Margaret bathed her face with cold water, arranged her hair, and changed her dress. When she sat down with her aunt, her back to the light, there was nothing unusual in her appearance. Mrs. Archibald, instead of being waited on and watched, now waited on Margaret, pressed her to eat, and made her commence lunch with a glass of wine. Margaret was greatly touched by her aunt's attentions, and responded gratefully. She told, in a cheerful tone, what orders she had given for dinner, and in all things proved to her aunt she was a Morton.

The page carried a verbal message to Miss Maunsell, to the effect that Mrs. Archibald sent her love, and wished to see her immediately.

This loving communication was transmitted through Mrs. Green, who drew her own conclusions from the deep sigh and ominous shake of the head with which her lodger received the intelligence. Nor did Mrs. Green overlook the emphasis with which her lodger said,—

“Wishes to see me immediately? I dare say she does, poor dear!”

And then Miss Maunsell sent her love to Mrs. Archibald and Miss Morton, and said she would be with them immediately.

Mrs. Green felt convinced something important had occurred.

We all remember our feelings under the first great shock our affections sustained. We can recall the darkness, the utter blackness, that enveloped our mental existence. The outer world was suddenly altered; everything had changed in aspect. It seemed as though Nature had just passed through a terrible convulsion, or was about to undergo one.

Margaret Morton felt so; but, as she took her way towards Miss Keel's, a new misery was added to this dreary state. She had not advanced twenty yards when she fancied that the servants along the terrace, who opened the house-doors to a ring, or who came up the area steps to stare, knew what had occurred,

and were talking of her. She believed the inhabitants on either side of the road were peeping from behind the blinds and pointing at her. Her sensations became intolerable. She could not continue her way to Miss Keel's. She returned, and finding Mary at the gate, taking goods from a tradesman—who, no doubt, knew the story—she entered quietly by the area passage, and stole up to her room. She locked the door on the inside, as if she could so shut out the world. She was too bewildered to think, too exhausted to examine into what had really happened. A general feeling of having been cruelly insulted pervaded her mind.

About three Margaret heard a tap at her door. She undid the lock, and saw Mrs. Archibald.

“ Dear aunt, what’s the matter ? ”

“ I just learned from Mary that you were in the house. You didn’t go to Miss Keel’s ? ”

“ No ; ‘twas very stupid, but I felt so fatigued, I couldn’t walk along.”

“ You did well, my dear, to come back. But why don’t you lie down ? ”

“ I’m quite well now, aunt. Has Miss Maunsell been ? ”

“ Yes. She’s gone to call on Madame Charleroi, where she is sure to see Miss West.

People might think of visiting me, either to congratulate or sympathize, which I don't want. In any case 'tis well to have the telling of one's own story, and Ellen will do that part. Mr. Browne has been. He 'll not dine with us. He and Mr. Wynum have business in the City ; they dine there, and afterwards go to the theatre. We shall be alone this evening with Ellen. You had better lie down, Margaret, till dinner."

" Dear aunt, I 'm quite fresh now. I 'll go with you to the drawing-room. You 'll take cold here."

The aunt and niece went downstairs, and in an easy-chair, in front of a bright fire, Margaret gradually fell into a doze, from which she was awoke by the announcement of dinner. Before descending to the dining-room, Miss Maunsell kissed Margaret, fetched a deep sigh, and moved off, significantly shaking her head.

It was a mute and maddening homily on broken hearts and faithless lovers.

Miss Keel came early in the evening. She entered the drawing-room smiling, and carrying in her hand a roll of music. It was a present to Margaret from Mrs. Keel, accompanied with a request that she would try the *morceau* that evening. The whim of the dear invalid awakened a smile. Margaret could not refuse

to gratify her; so she and Miss Keel went off to the piano; and Miss Keel laughed when Margaret played a wrong note, and the duet was re-commenced; and eventually Margaret took an interest in doing it correctly, and succeeded. Miss Keel sang some pretty ballads, all of a cheery character, and at length asked Margaret to give particular attention to the words of a song she was about to sing; and when Margaret praised the sentiments very much, Miss Keel laughed, and said the words were Margaret's own, and added she had lots of her poetry, which she intended to set to music and publish some day, "and then," said the amiable artist, "we shall both make money."

Miss Maunsell, who was playing cribbage with Mrs. Archibald at the other side of the room, observed, in a low tone to her partner, it was a providence to see that "dear Keel" in such spirits, and able to amuse Margaret.

The simple-minded Miss Keel loved Margaret; and love is keener than logic, and more sharp-sighted than self-interest.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. WYNUM was too refined in feeling to appear at Mrs. Archibald's immediately on hearing of her nephew's marriage. Remembering the parts he and his son had lately played there, he thought it more delicate to remain away; but on the afternoon following the astounding announcement, accompanied by Mr. Browne, Mr. Wynum made a short call at Eva Terrace. To make no allusion to Richard's marriage would be to treat the event as a crime; to dilate upon it would be a blunder. He said he had received wedding-cards, and thought the affair was quickly got up. "Archibald," said Mr. Wynum, "might have done better, according to our notions; but every man must work out the problem of life for himself."

Mr. Wynum returned in the evening, took part in a rubber, and made no further allusion

to Mr. Archibald's marriage. Neither did Mr. Browne; and all would have gone on as usual, but for Miss Maunsell, whose attention was incessantly directed to Margaret. She would beckon her from the other side of the room, seat her beside herself, call her "poor pet" and "poor child," make her look at the cards she was about to play, sometimes give them into her hand, and, turning away, would shake her head and soliloquize, "Men were deceivers ever." Not all Mrs. Archibald's tact nor Mr. Wynum's wiles could prevent the frequent repetition of the obnoxious quotation.

Within a week Mrs. Archibald learned from Mr. Browne, who had called at the City office, that Mr. Morton was still at Brighton, but was expected immediately to town. The newly married pair had left for Paris.

Margaret Morton had recovered from the numbness that had seized her on first receiving intelligence of Richard Archibald's marriage. And what various phases of feeling succeeded! Sometimes a tempest of anger swept across her soul. She had been slighted, and for whom? For one with whom she would esteem it an offence to be compared. She was, perhaps, at that moment a subject of mockery to the Grants, to have ever associated with whom

was a humiliation. Then Margaret paced her room to and fro, her face burning with rage and shame. Suddenly she stopped short. Would she lower her mind to the meanness of petty jealousy and detracting comparisons? Would such be worthy fruits of her uncle's teaching, and had Richard been true to that same teaching? Decidedly not. She asked herself, what did she regret? and was obliged to confess she did not know. Richard was no longer anything to her, for he had proved himself not to be the Richard in whom she had believed.

Then Margaret sat down and thought again, and felt that it is not as regards our spiritual existence alone that we live by faith. The man who proves unworthy of the trust placed in him ceases to exist for those that formerly esteemed him. He does not die; he is annihilated, blotted out of creation, as far as the hearts he has outraged are concerned.

Mrs. Archibald received a note from Henry Morton. It was short:—

“DEAR AUNT,—Dick has taken on himself the honours and responsibilities of a married man. He is off to Paris for his honeymoon. All the business of the office is thrown on my

shoulders for the present. I shall manage to see you and Meg to-morrow. With love.

“Your affectionate Nephew,
“H. M.”

On the following morning Henry Morton entered the library, where his sister was sitting at breakfast. Margaret instinctively hurried to meet her brother.

“My dear Harry, I’m delighted to see you. I didn’t expect you so early. Have you breakfasted?”

“Long since. Meg, I’m obliged to work hard. How is aunt?”

“Very poorly; not at all as strong as she used to be.”

“That’s bad, but the weather is against her. She’ll be well in summer.”

“She didn’t get well last summer.”

“Oh, but she will next summer; I’m certain of it. By-the-bye, what did she say about Dick’s marriage?”

Margaret rose, rang the bell, and fumbled a little at the bookcase before resuming her seat. Her brother repeated,—

“What did she say?”

“Her opinion wasn’t asked.” Margaret spoke coldly. “She wasn’t invited to the wedding.”

"That wasn't the Grants' fault; it was Dick's. He didn't wish for anybody. I suppose I shouldn't have been invited myself, only I happened to be at Brighton. He was going to Paris in a hurry, and all of a sudden takes it into his head to get married. I had nothing to do with it. The Grants are no ways to blame."

Margaret believed they deserved praise in their generation, but did not say so.

"Now, Margaret," said her brother, "I've come up early that I may catch you alone. You're my only sister; and I may say I'm your only brother, for you know nothing of Ned, and besides his mother was not our mother. At the present moment I'm your natural guardian, and have a right to ask you this question,—Did Richard ever make you an offer of marriage?"

"Never."

Margaret answered abruptly and looked surprised.

"Did he ever make you a declaration of love?"

"Never."

"My dear Margaret, I can't tell what a load you've taken off my mind. I'm glad to know Richard is an honourable man, because, no matter what commercial relations may exist

between us, no man shall with impunity insult my sister."

"Richard never insulted me."

"No, Margaret; nobody could insult you. Richard admired you—admired you more than any woman in the world; but he knew he wasn't worthy of you,—he told me so."

Margaret winced. She had been discussed, and her name bandied about.

"The Grants are very good people, Meg. The mother is a plain woman; but the daughters are very nice girls, and think there's no one like you in the world. I must be off."

"Won't you stay to see aunt? Won't you stay for lunch?"

"I can't, dear; but I'll return in the evening."

Henry Morton kissed his sister and hurried away.

Margaret was again alone, and turned her thoughts upon herself. Her brother had made out a case against her. Richard had never made her either a declaration of love or an offer of marriage. Harry had made her feel she had no just grounds for resentment. At the moment she appeared to herself in a ridiculous light, and questioned instinctively whether she did not appear so to others. To a

woman of Miss Morton's principles that was a crucial question. She went on thinking. Richard was her cousin; brought up with her, he had possibly felt nothing for her but brotherly affection. But then came the recollection of his wild jealousy against Cornet Wynum and even against Monsieur Claude. He showed something more than brotherly affection then. Margaret was unconsciously trying to make out a rebutting case against her brother's statements, but she felt she had no direct evidence; she could adduce no positive proofs. She had deduced from her aunt's remarks that Richard had been interdicted speaking openly to her: she regretted it. Had he been allowed to speak, even though he had afterwards broken his vows, she should have had proofs of his sentiments. Margaret blamed her aunt for having imposed silence on Richard.

Margaret blamed her aunt; but she did not understand how kindly and how wisely that aunt had acted, in sparing her the hearing of those terrible words of passion, which, when unfulfilled, echo mournfully through long after-years in the desolated chambers of a woman's heart.

Miss Morton tried to pronounce dispassionately on the case. Of one thing, however, she

was certain—the conversation with Harry had proved it—in addition to her other losses, she had lost a brother.

Mrs. Archibald listened quietly to the particulars of the *tête-à-tête* between the brother and sister as told by Margaret. At the close she said,—

“ Margaret, do you think Henry will marry the other sister ?”

“ I’m sure of it. I have no doubt they’re engaged.”

“ Poor Henry ! poor dear Henry ! So like his father. ’Twill be his ruin.”

“ One sister,” said Margaret, stiffly, “ is as good as the other.”

“ Perhaps ; but Richard is so much better able to contend with adverse circumstances than Henry.”

Margaret felt annoyed. So incalculable are the workings of the human heart, she resented the implied conclusion that a wife of inferior qualifications was good enough for the husband that had been contemplated for her. She said quietly,—

“ They’ve made their own choice.”

“ Very true. But we can’t shut our eyes to the consequences. Poor Henry ! And who’s to bring up his children ? Fancy daughters reared by Mrs. Grant’s daughter !—’tis terrible

to think of. Should they inherit the talent of their father's family, their degradation is all the more certain. A woman endowed with intellect, and denied virtuous training, is in the high road to ruin. And, as I have said, who's to train Henry's children? My dear Margaret, a man never recovers the consequences of such a connexion; they cling to him through life, and, still worse, they cling to his children."

Margaret Morton was just then in a frame of mind unsatisfactory to herself, and which lowered the grandeur of her once-untempted mental pride. She entertained a latent wish to see Richard punished in his matrimonial choice.

Another hasty note from Harry. He was off to Paris: important business called him there. A few posts passed, and Margaret received a letter signed, "Your affectionate sister, Marie Morton." This note contained strong protestations of affection, together with a hope that "dear Margaret" would always look on her brother and sister's house as a second home. The intelligence of Henry Morton's marriage fell on the hearts of his aunt and sister with a force that might be likened to that of a spent ball. They had anticipated; they were prepared for the blow.

The Christmas of that year was unlike every other passed by Mrs. Archibald during her widowhood. Her nephews were absent, and she missed them very much. They were worse than absent; she regarded them as lost. That Christmas Mrs. Archibald's friends made greater efforts than ever to amuse her, and she responded gratefully. Not that Mrs. Archibald or her niece exhibited external symptoms of disappointment, because of the adverse alliances that had taken place in their family; but their friends knew that at least they were more lonely than they were accustomed to be at that season. Amongst those friendly Christmas visitors was Miss West. Margaret Morton, taught by recent experience, had learned to recognize Miss West's many good qualities, and regretted that she had not entered on a nobler career than that which she had chosen.

Christmas had passed, and the New Year was ushered in by a cold, sleety January, very trying to a confirmed invalid as Mrs. Archibald now was. Lying on her couch one wintry afternoon, she called to her niece, who was sitting at the window, "Margaret, I feel very dreary. I think these early dinners don't agree with me. I was much better when I dined late."

“The doctor has recommended early dinners, aunt. How do you feel?”

“Oh, so dull—so very dull; and everything is so dark.”

“The weather is dull, aunt; but—” Margaret spoke hesitatingly—“’tis so early to light gas.”

“Yes; but gas won’t do. I feel dark within. Margaret, I feel as if the world were gliding away from me. I don’t know what it means.”

“Dear aunt, you ’ll be better in the morning. You’re always a little dull in the evening.”

“Yes; I think, Margaret, ’tis better to light the gas. Call Somers. Everything is so dark.”

The servant lighted the gas, and Margaret persuaded her aunt to take a glass of wine and a few spoonfuls of jelly.

“Margaret,” said Mrs. Archibald, after a silence, during which she had kept her eyes closed, “you can’t imagine what strange thoughts cross my mind sometimes. I feel as though I had been doing wrong all my life.”

“Oh, aunt!”

“Yes, I do. I often think of that poor Clifton. I fancy I’m to blame for her folly. That thought often comes across my mind at night. But what could I do? She had no right to set herself up as a lady. The silly

woman! Putting on rouge to catch a young husband! 'Twas extremely ridiculous."

Mrs. Archibald laughed faintly, and relapsed into silence. After a time she spoke,—

“ ‘Tis strange, Margaret, that the thought of Clifton should haunt me as it does: sometimes I see her looking wan and haggard, as if she were starving; sometimes I hear her complain of being ill used by her husband, and she always reproaches me with her misfortunes. What could I have done?”

“ I don’t know, aunt.”

“ ‘Twasn’t my business to teach her.”

“ I think, aunt, she knew enough.”

“ She had no right to imitate her betters.”

“ ‘Twas very silly; but, aunt, drive away these troublesome thoughts. Perhaps Clifton is quite comfortable. Try to sleep. Miss Maunsell, Mr. Wynum, and Mr. Browne will be here presently, and you’ll play your rubber. Don’t think of Clifton.”

Margaret Morton knew as little as her aunt what kind of teaching mistresses are bound to give their servants.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE is an underground railway, on one of whose many platforms we are all sure to find ourselves at some time or another, booked to make an inevitable journey. No return tickets are issued on that line, for the passengers that go by those trains never come back. There is no danger of collision, for the trains are never a minute late, and all go one way, but whether "up" or "down" no man knows but he that makes the journey. There is no distinction of first, second, and third class passengers. The carriages are uniform; the passengers all pay the same price, and all pay in a peculiar coin, current only on that line. This coin is denominated "life," and is laid down more or less promptly by different travellers. It fluctuates wonderfully in value; in fact, few seem to understand its real worth till called to give it up. Then people chaffer and would fain delay; but the guards on the

Underground, though civil, are peremptory, and often snatch the coin from the reluctant payer, and hurry him into the train. Another peculiarity about the popular estimate of this coin is that many who value excessively what they possess of it treat with the utmost contempt like coinage of which others are the owners.

When all are hurried into the train—for few ever seem to be ready when it arrives—a most democratic equality is found to prevail in the arrangements. The fine lady, who rode in the Park, on a cantering horse or in a fine coach, and who glided through richly furnished rooms in a train of brocaded silk, is sitting, shorn of her pomp, beside the ragged, broken-hearted mother who toiled from early morning to late eve to get bread for her starving children, and who for their sakes bore with the persistent brutality of a drunken husband. In that train the degraded debauchee, the heartless seducer, finds himself face to face with the pale suicide of eighteen, her long hair dripping with the waters of the Thames, her thin garments clinging to her emaciated limbs, her sunken eyes staring at him from their cavernous depths with a haunting glare. He hears an infant's feeble

cry—bah! 'tis fancy, he sees no child. He tries to change his place, but cannot. Face to face with that pale suicide he journeys on, still hearing the faint wailing cry, and so must he pass through the long, dark tunnel into which the train is entering. The position of that man is terrible, but there are hundreds in the same train as uncomfortably juxtaposed as he.

The quibbling legislator and the prevaricating judge there find themselves confronted with the gibbet-hung skeleton of a wretch condemned by law for crimes which law could have prevented, but did not. The vain-glorious despot, the robber-ruler, the hard-hearted conqueror, see before them in long vistas heaps of mangled bodies, ruins of plundered villages and towns, desecrated churches, starving women and children, broken-hearted wives and bereaved mothers; and a chorus of heavenward cries for justice fall in distinctly formed words on the ears of the now crownless authors of that devastation and woe.

By this Underground Mrs. Archibald went on *the* long journey, but so quietly did she take her departure that no one could tell the exact moment at which she left. However,

her house knew her no more, and her friends heard her no longer.

Margaret Morton was not so overcome by the death of her aunt as those about her expected she would be. She was a girl of strong nerves, and had been for some months past hardened into a tone of determined resistance by the conduct of her cousin and brother. She felt that her aunt had been deceived by both these men, and she could not divest herself of the belief that disappointment in the hopes she had hoarded in her nephews had hastened her death. This conviction legitimatized in Margaret Morton's mind the resentment she felt against her two relatives. She longed to see Richard and Harry at Eva Terrace, and see them contemplate what she called their own work. But both gentlemen were at Paris: neither had been in England since his marriage.

Mr. Browne informed Mrs. Archibald's nephews of their aunt's death. Mr. Morton came to London immediately, and wept abundantly beside the silent dead. His sister's heart softened as she witnessed his grief, and recognized the truth of what her aunt had often said about the impressionable Harry, who now embraced his sister, said his house

was hers, and that his poor little wife longed to see her.

Mr. Morton was bearer of a message from Mr. Archibald, to the effect that his cousin Margaret need not hurry to quit Eva Terrace, and that, in case of leaving, she was welcome to take anything which, from association, she valued.

Mr. Browne arranged the details following on the death, and after the funeral read Mrs. Archibald's will. She left what remained of her savings — about 500*l.* — to her niece, together with all her personal effects, and expressed a hope that her nephew, Henry Morton, and her husband's nephew, Richard Archibald, would act towards her niece, Margaret Morton, according to her known wishes.

Mr. Browne had endeavoured, but in vain, to induce Mrs. Archibald to say something more definite touching the latter point.

Henry Morton, in a conversation with his sister, made some vague allusions to money borrowed from his aunt, and was astonished to find Margaret knew all about the 4,000*l.* One of his first acts would be to refund, or at least secure to Margaret by deed, the money in question. As for Dick, he knew his sentiments on the subject.

Mr. Browne, on the authority of a letter deposited with him, revealed Mrs. Archibald's further wishes with regard to her niece. Mrs. Archibald desired that Margaret should reside with Miss Keel until her brother should make a definite provision for her, according to understood pecuniary arrangements.

A satisfactory understanding on these points having been arrived at, Henry Morton returned to Paris. He would have taken his sister with him, but that he and his wife were living in an hotel. Business kept him at Paris. As for his wife, "Poor little creature," said Henry, "she had so little amusement before marriage, I feel it a duty to show her something of life now."

The kind-hearted man did not think of alleviating his sister's desolation by procuring her any recreation.

Margaret Morton, left to herself in the house made empty by death, thought and thought, and, instead of sinking into dejection under her affliction, rose proud and strong in the determination to work, and not alone support herself, but make an independence. Margaret Morton did not yet know how difficult it is for a woman, whatever her capabilities, to win bread, because of the social impediments that lie in her way.

Miss Maunsell's knowledge of the world was now of immense advantage. She ordered the mourning, paid the servants, and having conducted Mr. Archibald's agent through the house, delivered him a list of what it contained. Miss Maunsell was not at all jealous about Mrs. Archibald's arrangements for her niece. Miss Keel had a house, Miss Maunsell was in lodgings; besides, it was only a temporary arrangement. Miss Morton's dear brother would soon take her to Paris. Delightful Paris!

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE months after her aunt's death, Margaret Morton met Richard Archibald for the first time since that event. Both were prepared for the meeting, and both had resolved to be calm. In the calmness of Miss Morton there was much pride, with a slight savouring of contempt; in the calmness of Mr. Archibald there was a certain defiance, that might be described as a protest of innocence or a denial of anybody's right to question his conduct. Certain it is, the forecast calmness of the cousins was not what might have been expected in relatives who met for the first time since the death of a beloved aunt, when a gush of sympathetic feeling would be naturally looked for, remembering their common loss. But, spite of previous resolves, they showed at the moment of meeting that they were not cousins, and never had been. The factitious relationship by which they had once held had been long

cut in sunder, never to be reunited. The words spoken were few, commonplace, and wondrously unsuited to the occasion. The *ci-devant* cousins were standing during the short interview, and at the close each retired to an opposite side of the room, more disturbed in mind than either would care to say. Margaret had had the best in that short contest. She had resolved to meet Richard with cold indifference, but the sight of him roused her indignation. She saw in him the man who had, as she believed, systematically deceived her aunt, and the deception was reared on a substratum of wrong to herself. The “How do you do, Richard ?” was uttered in a calm, low tone, as she held out her hand, but her spirit suddenly rising in pride and scorn made her dark-grey eyes seem black as they met his. Richard felt he was despised, but he did not lose his presence of mind. His words were as few and as insignificant as Margaret’s, but he felt he was worsted. He had intended to meet her quietly and affectionately, as became the cousinly part he had assumed ; but Margaret’s manner overturned his resolves, and he resumed his seat, feeling very uncomfortable. He masked his retreat under a show of much friendly attention to Miss Maunsell, whilst

Henry Morton, who had been nervously watching his sister and Richard, though apparently engaged in looking at ‘Views of Paris,’ immediately took a seat beside Margaret, and was lavish of friendly sayings and kind attentions.

The interview above mentioned took place in Mrs. Grant’s drawing-room, Pimlico, where Margaret and Miss Maunsell appeared by invitation, and where they met Mrs. Morton, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Archibald. Margaret was received most affectionately by all the ladies. Marie and Julie called her by her Christian name, and Mrs. Grant, having addressed her two or three times as “Miss Morton,” lapsed into “Margaret,” and said she knew she would be excused, “because, dear,” she added, with a pressure of the hand, “we’re all one family now.”

Mr. Morton looked pleased, and the tension of Margaret’s feelings relaxed in presence of Mrs. Grant’s homely good nature.

Dinner was over, and the gentlemen were seated at their wine. The retirement of the ladies must have been found a relief, to judge by the easy attitude and lolling indolence of the occupants of the dining-room, each of whom was gently smoking a cigar.

“Old Maunsell isn’t as jolly as she used to

be," said Mr. Archibald, breaking silence, "though she looks right well."

"Poor Miss Maunsell! She misses aunt. 'Twas a great blow to her."

"Yes, no doubt. They were so accustomed to one another."

"Dick, aunt was a very clever woman. What knowledge of the world! How perfectly well bred! I don't meet any one like her."

"I suppose not." Mr. Archibald drank off the wine that remained in his glass and re-filled it. "I say, Harry, you can't do better than take that house at Richmond near mine."

"I don't like going out of town, because of office hours."

"Nonsense! I'm going, and why not you? You can come in by the 9.45 train and go back by the 6.15. Besides, let the worst come, you can ride in."

"Ah, there you have an advantage over me. I can't set up a carriage yet. You have 1,000*l.* a year fixed. I must wait on business."

"Nonsense, man! Take the house, set up the carriage, and the money will come of itself. 'Tis better we should live near to each other. Julie and Marie would be much happier for it."

"Well, I must try. We're very unsettled at present."

"Indeed, you are. Try to get out of this place, and into a house of your own."

"I certainly will. We had better go upstairs."

In the drawing-room coffee was being served as the gentlemen entered. After a little while a game of whist was got up, in which Miss Maunsell and Mrs. Grant had Mr. Morton and Mr. Archibald for partners. Marie, Julie, and Margaret were left to amuse themselves. This they did by talking, the chief expense of the conversation being defrayed by Marie and Julie, who gave Margaret ecstatic descriptions of what they had seen at Paris, both in the way of amusement and dress.

"I do wish," said Mrs. Archibald, "we were out of mourning. I should so like to order some new dresses."

"Oh, Julie, and you have so many!" said her sister.

"And so have you; but they'll be out of fashion before three months. Oh, three months is a long time; and Harry says we must wear black three months longer."

"Yes, of course," said Marie, looking at

Margaret; “we have no objection to wear black. ‘Tis right and proper.”

Then Julie volunteered to sing some French ballads for Margaret, and the three went off to the piano. The sisters sang a duet, and the newly married men put down their cards and listened. Henry Morton was fond of music. Richard Archibald had no ear, and did not care for harmony; but he was proud of his wife’s musical talents, and fond of hearing her vocal superiority acknowledged wherever she sang.

Miss Maunsell and Miss Morton left Bloomfield Terrace about ten o’clock. At parting Margaret was overwhelmed with embraces by the ladies, and with affectionate invitations to come often, and without being asked.

For the first time since her aunt’s death Margaret Morton recognized the fact that she was *homeless* as the cab drove off, and she left her brother standing at his door, looking sad as he saw his sister depart.

“Poor Harry!” thought Margaret, as she recalled her aunt’s words that a man never recovers the consequences of an ill-assorted marriage.

During the ride home Miss Maunsell was silent; she did not even sigh. At parting she kissed Margaret affectionately, and said,—

"God bless you, dear, and protect you!"

Now that Mr. Morton and his wife were established at Bloomfield Terrace, Margaret and Miss Maunsell were invited to dine there once every week. This hebdomadal family meeting continued for some time, till it came to be looked on as a matter of course. The dinner-party was quiet and simple as the mourning dresses of the guests. It happened that one Wednesday—the customary day of meeting—Miss Maunsell, not feeling well, declined to go to Bloomfield Terrace. It was too late in the afternoon to send an apology; but that did not matter, as they would not be waited for, and could go on the following day. It was a simple family affair, and invitations had long ceased to be issued. But on the succeeding day Miss Maunsell was not yet well enough to venture abroad, so it was resolved, lest offence should be taken, that Margaret should go alone. It was six o'clock when she arrived at her brother's. There was an unusual stir in the house; the door was opened by a man in livery instead of the usual maid-servant, and gas was ablaze in every room. Miss Morton had dismissed her cab before she became aware of these evidences of festivities. Her first impulse was to retire, but her cab

was gone ; and whilst she stood hesitating in the passage the man in livery opened the door of the dining-room, said something, and out came Mrs. Grant.

“ Oh, Margaret dear, I’m so glad to see you ; I’m so glad you’re come. We expected you yesterday.”

“ Miss Maunsell was ill. She’s not very well to-day. I shan’t stay.”

“ Indeed you must. Harry, Harry !”

Mr. Morton ran down from the drawing-room. Taking his sister by the hand, he led her into the dining-room ; then, turning to Mrs. Grant, he said angrily,—

“ How could you keep Margaret talking in the passage, and before that servant !”

“ Oh, I forgot. But she wouldn’t come in. She wanted to go away.”

“ Margaret,” said her brother, pressing her hand, “ you’ll stay ? I ask it as a personal favour.”

There was an expression of softness, almost of sadness, in Harry’s blue eyes as he spoke. Margaret, wishing to make the best of matters, laughed.

“ But, Harry, I’m not in dinner costume, and you have company.” She glanced at the dinner-table.

“Only Dick and his wife, and a few business people.”

“Well, Harry, I’ll stay, only pray don’t be ashamed of me.” And she playfully caught hold of her black dress.

“Margaret, I can never be otherwise than proud of you.”

Margaret laughed again, though she felt sad as she followed Mrs. Grant upstairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Archibald were the last to arrive. No sooner were they come than dinner was announced. Captain Pennyfeather was leaning against the corner of the mantel-piece, trying his powers of fascination on Miss Morton, when her brother came up.

“Captain, will you take Mrs. Grant to dinner? I’ll take charge of my sister.”

The captain made a bow, and moved off towards Mrs. Grant. Harry gave his arm to his sister; they descended in zigzag fashion the narrow staircase. Mr. Archibald did not perceive, till seated at table, that Miss Morton was one of the guests. He made her a friendly salute, which she returned in the like spirit.

The dinner was excellent, and the dresses of the ladies magnificent. Mrs. Archibald and Mrs. Morton had laid aside their mourning robes, and now displayed some of their Parisian

toilettes. There was old Grant, who, though so mythical in former times, now appeared as a *habitué* of his nephew-in-law's house. There was Mrs. Sams—Mrs. Grant's bosom friend—short and stout, and bare necked ; there was Mrs. Riddle—Mrs. Sams's niece—shining in satins and blazing in jewels ; and there was Captain Pennyfeather, looking grand and fierce, in a pair of white kid gloves, and well-oiled jet-black moustaches. There were a few other men and women, all strangers to Margaret.

The first move made in the drawing-room, when the ladies found themselves alone there after dinner, was towards the occupation of easy-chairs and couches. In the selection Mrs. Grant looked after Margaret's interests, and placed her on a sofa, one end of which she occupied herself. After a few minutes, Margaret's co-partner in the sofa lapsed into slumber, noted at intervals by a snore, after the utterance of which she stirred for a moment into a state of semi-somnolence, and, after casting a sluggish glance around, dozed off again to repeat the exercise of snoring and waking.

Meanwhile, Margaret sat with half-closed eyes in the twilight made by the lowered gas.

Her thoughts were of her brother. He had shown much affectionate consideration for her. He had given her the first place at his table, he had exhibited a pride in his sister which his other guests could not fail to note, but Margaret could not conceal from herself that all this display of affection on the part of her brother looked like an outburst of feeling, mingled with a certain defiance, as though he would say, “There is nobody like my sister; nobody I esteem so much; and nobody shall break the bond that unites us.”

Margaret’s heart overflowed with tenderness for her brother, but it was a tenderness mingled with sadness. She remembered her aunt’s prognostics and apostrophe—“Poor Harry, poor Harry !”

When the gentlemen appeared, the ladies woke into liveliness. Mrs. Riddle took the lead in the vivacious display, whilst Mrs. Morton and Mrs. Archibald emulated the fashion of her attractiveness to the best of their ability. Margaret Morton was astonished that Henry and Richard could sanction such vulgarity. Henry was sitting beside his sister, when these thoughts passed through her mind. He read them, and said,—

“Mrs. Grant is a plain, good-natured woman.

She adores Mrs. Sams and her set; but I'll put an end to all this when I'm in my own house."

"Isn't this your house, Harry?"

"It is and it isn't. Poor Marie is so devoted to her mother, she cannot bear to leave her."

At this moment Mr. Archibald drew near.

"Ah, Dick, you haven't seen Margaret yet."

"I have seen, but not spoken with her," said Richard, presenting his hand. "How sombre you look, Margaret!"

Mr. Archibald's manner was unlike that of ancient days. He was constrained, whilst affecting a vivacity foreign to his nature, and which sat ill upon him.

"You really do look very solemn, Margaret."

"I suppose I'm out of place amid these gay surroundings. I'm like the mummy in the Egyptian feast, an uninvited and, I presume, an unwelcome guest."

"Oh, Margaret," said Harry, "though uninvited, you're not unwelcome. We thought you wouldn't care for these people. When Dick and I are settled in our own houses 'twill be different."

"Of course," said Dick.

Margaret feared she had committed herself by a certain sharpness in her speech. She now smiled, and, turning to Mr. Archibald,

asked questions about Paris, said Harry had sent her his last article, which she had read with pleasure; and, finally, his own affairs and personal interests being made the subject of conversation, Richard Archibald became perfectly natural and thoroughly egotistical. He spoke of his magazine articles as though they ought to become standards of thought, and at the same time assured Margaret they were nothing compared with what he intended to write.

Mr. Morton had left his sister and cousin to entertain each other, and had walked about the room, saying a word to each of his guests. He spoke with his wife and her sister, who formed part of a noisy group of which Mrs. Riddle was the centre figure, and where Captain Pennyfeather was the chief orator. After a little time, Mrs. Morton and Mrs. Archibald made their way to where Mr. Archibald and Miss Morton were sitting.

“Margaret,” said Mrs. Archibald, “Harry has been saying that Marie and I neglect you, but I think he wishes me to watch you and my husband. You’re flirting dreadfully.”

Marie giggled in feeble admiration of her sister’s sally. Mr. Archibald knitted his brows. He knew his wife’s vulgarity would lower her

in Miss Morton's eyes. Mrs. Archibald noted her husband's frown, but did not heed it. She was magnificently dressed, and looked beautiful. Strong in these two points, she could afford, according to her calculations, to defy marital anger. Mr. Archibald looked very grave; Miss Morton's better nature led her to take part with the wife, for whom she made place beside her, and whom she informed that the subject of Mr. Archibald's conversation had been the wonders of Paris.

"Oh, Paris! Paris! I wish we were all in Paris. You've never been to Paris, Margaret. You would be delighted. What exquisite dresses you could have! Now, Richard, don't you think Margaret would look lovely in a violet velvet, trimmed with Brussels lace; don't you think so? Now say you do."

And Mrs. Archibald caught her husband's hand, and looked straight in his face. A newly married man easily forgives a little vulgarity in his young and beautiful wife, especially when he intends to eradicate the vulgarity. So Richard Archibald smiled affectionately, and assented to all his wife's propositions; besides, if her manners were less than stately, she erred at that moment through good nature. So probably did Mrs. Morton,

though her brother-in-law condemned her for stupidity, when she said,—

“ Margaret, when will you throw off black ? ”

“ Not for a long time, I think.”

“ Oh, 'tisn't necessary to wear mourning for an aunt longer than six months. We've thrown off ours.”

“ You have not lost an aunt,” said Margaret, gravely.

“ Oh, but Dick and Harry have ! 'Tis the same thing. They said we may throw off black.”

Mr. Morton was standing behind his wife whilst she made these wise observations.

“ I want you two, Marie and Julie,” he said, “ to sing a duet.”

This broke up the group. Miss Morton moved nearer the piano, partly that she might hear the singing better, and partly as a change of place. The duet had drawn all the company in the same direction, some close to the instrument, some further off. Margaret was standing in the outer circle, one hand resting on a canterbury, when the polite Captain Pennyfeather found her a chair, put himself in an attitude beside her, and occasionally directed her attention to passages in the music by the action of his white hand, on the fourth finger of which glistened a diamond ring.

The duet finished, Margaret told her brother, who was seldom from her side, that it was ten o'clock, and she should like to leave. Mrs. Grant heard the remark.

"Dear Margaret," she said, "don't think of going. We shan't break up before three. We never do when Mrs. Riddle is here,—do we, Harry? And, Margaret dear, I'm so glad you came without old Miss Maunsell. Isn't it pleasanter? She's such a dose!"

"Miss Maunsell," said Margaret, coldly, "was my aunt's oldest friend. Neither my brother nor I can forget that."

Mr. Morton, who looked very much annoyed, requested Mrs. Grant to order a glass of wine for his sister in the dining-room, whilst she put on her bonnet. Mrs. Grant, wholly unconscious of the awkwardness of her remarks, hastened to see Mr. Morton's wish fulfilled. Marie accompanied her sister-in-law upstairs when she went to put on her bonnet.

Miss Morton had taken a glass of wine and a biscuit when the cab arrived. Having bid a friendly adieu to Marie and her mother, she stepped into the vehicle. So did Mr. Morton.

"I'll take Margaret home," he said to his wife.

On the way to Kensington poor Harry was

profuse in his protestations of affection to his sister, as well as of assurances that Marie thought as he did on that subject, and, like him, longed to be in her own house, that Margaret might be more with them. Margaret said it was very good of Marie to think of her.

When Miss Maunsell learned there had been a large party at Bloomfield Terrace, to which neither she nor Margaret had been invited, she was much offended, and declared she would never again enter the house without a formal invitation. Though Margaret thought it a duty to tell Miss Maunsell of the dinner-party, she said nothing about Mrs. Grant's remarks. These she communicated to Mr. Browne, who agreed in her opinion that Harry was not his own master, but hoped things would assume a better aspect when he would be able to separate himself from Mrs. Grant and her acquaintances, and establish himself with his wife in his own house. Mr. Browne, at the same time, tried to impress on Margaret the necessity and duty of keeping on good terms with her brother, and of seeing him as frequently as possible. It was a line of conduct laid down by her aunt, who had foreseen Harry's domestic difficulties.

From the time Miss Morton had taken up

her residence at Miss Keel's, Miss Maunsell called on her every day, sat with her, or took her out for a drive. When Margaret did not dine with her, the kind-hearted old lady often returned of an evening, accompanied by Mr. Browne and sometimes by Mr. Wynum. Margaret was very sensible of this kindness, especially on the part of Miss Maunsell, by whom the loss of her old friend was severely felt, but whose generous nature found consolation in soothing another's grief. But Miss Maunsell's sympathy was not concentrated absolutely on Margaret. She pitied Mr. Wynum, who sat alone in his chamber of an evening, when he did not go to Miss Keel's, and his visits there were very, very rare. Mr. Browne felt an obligation to be as much as possible with Miss Morton, for to his care she had been, in a great measure, committed by her aunt. This state of things soon became distressing to Miss Maunsell. Mr. Wynum's dulness she ascribed to the natural inability of the male sex to help themselves in the minor difficulties of life : she was made unhappy by thinking of his loneliness.

“He has many sorrows, dear,” she would say to Margaret. “Separated from his dear son, whose fate is uncertain ; perhaps at this

very moment he 's—but we 'll not think of that. Margaret dear, our great loss falls very heavy on him. It has broken up what I may call his second home. It has fallen still heavier on you, my dear, I know; but you 're young, you 've life before you, and you 're blessed in a dear good brother. But poor Mr. Wynum! just think of his position."

Margaret did think of it, and thought, too, of Miss Maunsell's unselfish kindness of heart that taught her to think only of others.

It was finally arranged that the former frequenters of Eva Terrace should in future assemble every evening at Miss Maunsell's; that each should live for the others and all for each. Mr. Browne was much pleased with these arrangements: they took a weight off his mind, as regarded his friend Wynum, and relieved him of the embarrassment he experienced in calling so frequently at Miss Keel's, lest doing so might become a subject of remark in the neighbourhood, and above all to the lady's pupils and connexions. This was an overstrained delicacy on Mr. Browne's part, and had its origin in observations made by Mr. Wynum, who started the difficulty as an excuse for not calling more frequently on Miss Morton. The pretext, however, was utterly

groundless, for Miss Keel had no resident pupils, and had for some time past confined her teaching to giving finishing lessons on the piano. But the difficulty, once raised, continued to exist for Mr. Browne, as long as he was obliged to make his visits to his ward at Miss Keel's.

When humble-hearted Miss Keel heard of the new arrangements in virtue of which she and Margaret were to go every evening to Miss Maunsell's, she said she had known all along that Margaret could not be happy at her house. She did not know, she said, how to make people happy.

Dear Miss Keel! You did not suspect that it was because you did not know how to make people happy, Mrs. Archibald, when she was looking for a home for her friendless niece, chose your house and your companionship. You did not suspect that the earnest love with which you sacrificed yourself for others—though you did not deem it a sacrifice—was appreciated even by one so judiciously self-collected as Margaret Morton's aunt.

Miss Maunsell had resolved that the first general meeting held at St. John's Terrace should give an earnest of her desire to suppress sadness and promote tranquil joy. An elabo-

rate tea was laid out. There were cakes and sweetmeats in abundance, there was a bountiful supply of flowers, and the room was more than usually brilliant with gas. Miss Maunsell wore her best suit of mourning, and looked the Queen of Night, as her jet ornaments and fringes shimmered in the light of the lamps. Margaret Morton, entering into the generous sentiments of her old friend, made the gayest toilette that crape and black cashmere permitted.

The gentleman for whose sake especially these preparations had been made got up his appearance in Miss Maunsell's rooms about seven o'clock. Mr. Wynum was in evening costume, and carried in his hand an apparently very large bouquet. Having paid his respects to the hostess and her friends, he proceeded to divide the large nosegay, which was then seen to consist of three parts, each complete in itself, and each compactly placed within the hold of a pretty silver *porte-bouquet*. Mr. Wynum presented one to each of the ladies, and this graceful offering obtained him a world of thanks, to say nothing of the admiration bestowed on the flowers. This was a cheerful commencement; but Mr. Wynum had more sunshine in store for his friends. He had that afternoon received a letter from his son, who

was enjoying high health and happiness. There were friendly messages for Miss Maunsell, and an account of a tiger-hunt given in detail, which the writer knew would amuse her. To judge from Mr. Wynum's account, the whole burden of his son's letter was a wish to live freshly in Miss Maunsell's memory. An uninterested observer might have remarked that the young soldier remembered one of his Kensington acquaintances to the exclusion of all the rest; but, as Miss Maunsell was not in the position of a critical observer, no such idea crossed her mind, nor did she entertain a suspicion that a few simple words in Cornet Wynum's letter had been voluminously paraphrased by his father.

Mr. Wynum continued to lead the conversation. He turned from the bouquets and the Indian letter to praise Miss Maunsell's tea-making, on which she piqued herself. Mr. Wynum had a delicate palate and was fond of tea, and when he eulogized her Chinese mixture Miss Maunsell was happy.

Everybody admired the vivacity and easy flow of Mr. Wynum's conversation. Mr. Browne felt as though he had been himself relieved of a great weight, but nobody divined the secret of that seemingly spontaneous flow. Mr.

Wynum was like a child who talks loud in the dark to cover his fears. He dreaded lest anyone should initiate a fresh topic involving allusions to the past. Every phase of existence over which a shadow hung was shunned by Mr. Wynum.

Was he so selfish as not to be able to sympathize with the sorrows of others, or was he so delicately constituted that even witnessing the woes of his neighbour caused him as much pain as rougher natures endure in supporting their personal afflictions? It would be difficult to say, but certain it is that Mr. Wynum avoided everything dull or dark or nightsome, and sought everything clear and bright and sunshiny.

Though whist was the ostensible object of that evening's meeting, not one of the company touched a card. Conversation, quiet, graceful, and entertaining, beguiled the time. Everybody in that room was desirous to please the other; each succeeded, and all were happy; none more so than Miss Maunsell, excepting Mr. Wynum, who had turned a nearly dried-up stream of domesticity back on to his own hearth, and had brought more immediately within his grasp the evening amusements to which he had been so long accustomed.

Mr. Browne had been asked by a friend who was leaving town to take charge of a piano; Mr. Browne, not having a fixed domicile in London, consulted Mr. Wynum, who, regarding the case as one that required delicate treatment, advised a reference to Miss Maunsell, and the result of a conference with that lady was, that the piano in question found a place on the first floor, No. 4, St. John's Terrace, to remain there during Miss Maunsell's good pleasure, or until Mr. Browne's mysterious friend should come to claim the property.

Nobody was better pleased than Margaret Morton with these arrangements. They seemed to reunite the scattered segments of the circle, broken by her aunt's death and the marriages of her brother and Richard Archibald. The circumference of that circle was less than of old, but it was still fair to look at, and strongly cemented by unity of feeling. By these arrangements Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum, those old staunch friends of her aunt, were made more comfortable, and Margaret was herself relieved of an embarrassment which she had confided only to Mr. Browne.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. ARCHIBALD had been more than twelve months dead ; Richard Archibald was established in his house and domain near Richmond, and Henry Morton was domiciled in a comfortable and capacious house in Russell Square. That the firm of Morton, Archibald & Co. was doing good and profitable business was an axiomatic assertion, requiring no demonstration. Mr. Browne at least thought so, and, considering the income spent to support the respective establishments of the partners, believed the time was come when he ought to bring the affairs of his ward, Margaret Morton, before her brother and cousin. Influenced by this conviction, he had an interview with Mr. Morton in his city office, and endeavoured to show him the desirability of making legal arrangements about the 4,000*l.* belonging to his sister. Mr. Morton agreed in all

Browne said. He assured the faithful guardian he had always intended to give his sister 10,000*l.*; she could not have forgotten that, he had told her so often. Mr. Browne said he had heard of Mr. Morton's generous intentions from the time of his arrival in England. The 10,000*l.* would be a gift to his sister; but, with regard to the 4,000*l.*, that was a matter of business, and it would be satisfactory to Mr. Browne that it should be settled in a business-like manner. At this point of the conversation Mr. Archibald entered the office.

“Good morning, Harry. How d' ye do, Mr. Browne?”

“Dick, you've just come in time. Mr. Browne has called about that 4,000*l.* of Margaret's.”

Mr. Archibald had taken off his hat and gloves, and seated himself. He now undid the buttons of his top-coat, drew a white perfumed handkerchief from the breast-pocket and lightly wiped his forehead.

“I've walked a good way, and am rather warm.”

Mr. Archibald was a handsome man, and the glow imparted by pedestrian exercise set off to advantage his dark complexion and manly features. Never forgetting he was member of

a learned profession, Mr. Archibald wore in transacting commercial business a certain elevation of manner ; he spoke judicially, and rather presided over the affairs of the firm than mingled actively therein. Now seated at his ease, his white handkerchief held in a hand scarcely less white, and resting on the office-table, he turned towards his partner.

“ Well, Harry, what money is this you’re talking of, what 4,000*l.*? ”

“ Money,” said Mr. Browne, firmly, “ that you borrowed from Mrs. Archibald, and which was the property of her niece, to whom I’m guardian.”

“ That money was lent for the benefit of the firm, and is invested in the business.”

“ That I take for granted ; but I consider it my duty to look to Miss Morton’s interests. She has no acknowledgment—no bond.”

“ Her aunt didn’t wish her to have,” said Mr. Archibald.

“ I’m aware of that ; but when Mrs. Archibald lent that money, she was influenced by considerations—” Mr. Browne stopped short ; he was near to making a blunder.

“ No considerations,” said Mr. Archibald, “ can alter facts. Mrs. Archibald lent this money to her nephews for their mutual benefit.

We have invested it in business, and it shall be ultimately repaid Miss Morton, with interest."

"Certainly," interposed Mr. Morton, warmly, "with large interest."

"Still," said Mr. Browne, "my ward has no security."

"Can she not trust her brother?" asked Mr. Archibald, haughtily.

"She does trust her brother, just as Mrs. Archibald trusted her nephews. That's a matter of family affection; but I speak as a man of business, and I look to Miss Morton's material interests."

"Surely, Mr. Browne," said Mr. Morton, and he spoke with feeling, "my sister's interests must be as dear to me as to you."

"No doubt; but I'm her legal guardian. Her aunt appointed me, and not anybody else."

"And what do you require, Mr. Browne?" asked Mr. Archibald.

"A bond for the money, bearing interest from the time the loan was made."

"Very good. Are we to understand Miss Morton wishes to press us for this money?"

"Not at all. Miss Morton knows nothing of my coming here to-day. I act on my own responsibility."

"Then 'tis with you we have to deal, Mr. Browne?"

"Yes. And I have no object at heart but Miss Morton's interests."

"Just so. But why ask for a bond, Mr. Browne? Why not trust our honour as Mrs. Archibald did?"

"I don't doubt your honour, Mr. Archibald, but business ought to be done in a business-like manner. The entire of Miss Morton's fortune is sunk in this firm, and she has not a scrap of paper in acknowledgment. That's unsatisfactory. Without meaning to cast a doubt on the stability of your house, or on the honour of the partners, I must say I should like tangible security. We're three men of business. I have perfect confidence in you both, gentlemen; but changes may occur. You may take another partner; my ward's money would then be no longer exclusively in the keeping of her brother and of her uncle's nephew."

"In case of such an eventuality," said Mr. Archibald, "proper steps would be taken to satisfy Miss Morton. 'Tis not likely her brother would overlook her interests."

"No; but changes arising from other causes may intervene. Life is uncertain. Should

Miss Morton's brother be called away, to whom should she look?"

"To me," said Mr. Archibald, haughtily.

"Precisely. Miss Morton would be then asking as a favour what, if she had legal security, she could demand as a right."

"'Pon my word, Mr. Browne," said Mr. Morton, "I had no idea you were so shrewd a man of business, or so keen a casuist."

"I was about to compliment Mr. Browne on the same points," said Mr. Archibald. "But here's our position. We acknowledge the debt. We acknowledge this firm owes Miss Morton 4,000*l.* I propose Miss Morton be asked to leave this 4,000*l.* in our firm for seven years, counting from the time we first received the money, and that the loan from the same date bear interest at the rate of six per cent. I also propose that the principal and interest be consolidated into a lump sum, the entire to be paid at the expiration of the term of seven years."

"Miss Morton loses the use of the money. I mean the interest for the five and a half years yet to run."

"Quite true, Mr. Browne; but that should be taken into consideration in fixing the aggregate sum. Does my proposal meet your approbation?"

"It requires reflection. I cannot give an answer just now. I should like to lay the case before Miss Morton and ask her opinion. Her brother"—looking at Mr. Morton—"has not said anything."

"My sister's interests are in your hands, Mr. Browne, and I know they couldn't be in better. My aunt thought so, and she was right. Dick and I are secondary in the business. We must wait your decision and Margaret's."

"For my own part," said Mr. Archibald, "'tis a transaction in which I scarcely care to be mixed up. I merely made a suggestion, a proposition, if you will, but I should much prefer that the affair be settled between Miss Morton and her brother. I shall now merely add that I make no objection to Miss Morton's money being withdrawn from the business. I don't deny it may be an inconvenience at the present moment, but I leave the matter entirely between Miss Morton and her brother."

Mr. Archibald passed into the other room, where he commenced to read his letters, brought by the morning post. Mr. Browne talked a little longer with Mr. Morton, and, on taking leave, said he would think over Richard's proposition and consult with Margaret.

The firm of Morton, Archibald & Co

lunched that day at the office. There was much business to be done, and Mr. Morton had some transactions coming off at the Stock Exchange later in the day. Up to one o'clock both gentlemen were very busy. Having discussed a chop and a couple of glasses of sherry, Mr. Archibald leaned back in his chair as he said,—

“What a deuced bore that old Browne is! And how very extraordinary of your sister to press for money!”

“She don't press for it. Margaret knew nothing of Mr. Browne's coming here. He did it of his own advising.”

“He's a deuced bore.”

“I must say he 's only doing his duty.”

“A very pleasant duty. Of course your sister will insist on her money?”

“You proposed to give it her.”

“I said I had no objection to give it her, nor have I, if you can only show me where to get it.”

“You proposed a bond ?”

“Yes; I proposed a bond for a consolidated sum, payable at the expiration of five and half years from this time. You know 'twill be easier for us to pay 10,000*l.* at the end of five years than to draw 4,000*l.* now out of the business.”

“I don't dispute that. But you propose a

bond ; Mr. Browne registers the bond, and our affairs are exposed."

"To a certain extent, no doubt."

"I don't see the value of your proposition."

"My dear fellow, my proposition is straightforward and business-like. I, as a comparative stranger, am bound to make that offer to your sister. The case now remains between you and her. The question is, will she trust her brother, or will she insist on a bond that will shake the firm to which he belongs, and make him less able to meet her demands ?"

There was a pause, during which Mr. Morton's head and eyes were bent downwards. At length, looking up, he said,—

"What do you advise ?"

"See your sister. Tell her how things really are. Margaret is a sensible woman ; she 'll see the folly of embarrassing her brother, and she 'll put a stopper on old Browne."

"I don't see my way, I confess."

Mr. Morton looked troubled.

"Well, my dear fellow, if you don't see your way, I can't help you. The affair rests between you and your sister, as I have said. For my part, I'm willing to let the money be drawn this day, and let the whole concern go smash."

“That would be folly.”

“Of course it would. But you can’t see your way, you say.”

“I’ll ask Margaret to forego the bond; but what about the interest of the money?”

“Have I not said the principal and interest are to be consolidated, and paid together at the expiration of the term?”

“But how is Margaret to live meanwhile?”

“On her ready money. You know aunt left her some hundreds.”

“Should she ask the interest on the 4,000*l.* to be paid quarterly?”

“You can’t do it. You know the business wouldn’t afford it.”

“I can’t bear the idea of Margaret’s being pinched. We ought to make an effort for her.”

“Look, Harry, this is child’s talk. We’re married men. We’ve wives and children,—at least, we’ve one child each, and I suppose we shall soon have more. You talk of making an effort for your sister. Are we not making an effort for her, when we keep up the firm? ’Tis absolutely necessary we should make an appearance: our credit depends on it. Surely your sister will be willing to make some sacrifice for you,—to put herself to some slight inconvenience. Margaret is not selfish.”

"No," said Harry; "she never was."

"Then, my dear fellow, you see 'tis a family affair. Your interests and your sister's are identical. In supporting our position you're virtually working for your sister. She must see that. I take no part in the matter. You have my full permission to pay over the money to your sister at once. I merely lay the consequences before you."

"I see everything, but I don't know how to act."

Here a knock at the door interrupted the conversation. Mr. Grant made his appearance.

"Good morning, Dick. Good morning, Harry. How are the wives and little ones? What! at lunch so early; 'tis scarcely noon."

"'Tis past one," said Harry. "You'd better have a chop."

"Thanks. I believe you're right. I'm too apt to forget lunch. I was passing, and thought I'd drop in, and see how you were getting on."

Mr. Grant often passed through Broad Street, and, strangely enough, his passage always took place about lunch-time; it was equally strange that he never knew the hour, and always believed the day to be sixty

minutes younger than it really was. The order for the chop having been issued, Mr. Grant, sitting bolt upright in his chair, awaiting the coming viands, remarked he had seen Mr. Browne at the other end of Broad Street. They had spoken; Mr. Browne mentioned he was coming from the offices of Morton & Archibald.

“I hope ‘twas nothing about that money of your aunt’s, Dick.”

“Did he say it was?”

“No. But an old fox like me has a keen scent.”

“Here’s the fruit,” said Mr. Archibald, angrily, “of having to do with fools. That old man will go about telling his Maunsells and Wynums, and all that clique, that we owe his ward 4,000*l.*, and can’t pay. And ‘twill come to the ears of these French people that have such magnificent offices in the next street, and our credit will be blasted.”

“Come, come, Dick,” said his uncle, “not so fast. This is not like you. If you don’t object to tell me what has occurred, as I know already something of these transactions with your aunt, I may be able to advise.”

The chop having arrived, Mr. Grant would not allow it to grow cold, and whilst employed

in averting the dreaded refrigeration, he listened attentively to Mr. Archibald's account of the interview with Mr. Browne, and the proposition that was to be submitted to Miss Morton's consideration.

"Your proposed arrangement, Dick, is admirable," said the mentor. "I'm convinced Miss Morton will accede, and I also feel convinced that a high-minded young lady, as I know her to be, will never require a bond from her brother and cousin. She will do as her noble-minded aunt did—trust a Morton and an Archibald."

"I say so too," said Richard; "but Harry hesitates to speak to his sister."

"Why?" And Mr. Grant looked wonderingly at Mr. Morton.

"'Tis this. I don't like the idea of the interest of my sister's money being consolidated with the capital, and I say, what is she to do meanwhile?"

"My dear Harry," said Mr. Grant, stretching forth his arm, "give me your hand. That's so like you, always thinking of others before yourself."

"I know," said Harry, after returning the clasp of his uncle's hand, "that my sister has some ready money; but I cannot forget

how she has been brought up, and what she has been accustomed to, and I don't think her position at present is what it ought to be. I believe aunt meant her stay with Miss Keel to be only temporary. If my sister was in regular receipt of the interest of her money, she would have more than 200*l.* a year, and could go where she pleased, and live in better style."

"She certainly could," said Mr. Archibald, "but would it be prudent for a young lady like Margaret to separate from Miss Maunsell, her aunt's old friend?"

"No, certainly not."

"Then, of what use would 200*l.* a year be to her? You know how Miss Maunsell lives. Margaret couldn't live beyond her, so that 200*l.* a year would be virtually useless to her. 'Tis far better for your sister that the money should remain in your hands, increasing by the addition of the interest till she becomes older."

"Quite right," said Mr. Grant: "this firm is still young, 'tis now in blossom; but if we nip the blossom we shall lose the fruit. If you pay over 4,000*l.* now, you ruin the firm. And what does your sister do? She lends the money to somebody else. She wouldn't invest in Consols. Mr. Browne wouldn't advise that;

the interest is too small. Now, see the folly of paying over this money to Mr. Browne. You injure yourselves, and don't serve Miss Morton. Yes," continued the old gentleman, "I have financed many a house, and, I must say, I have never seen a young house look forward to better prospects than this. All the advice I have now to give is, don't ruin yourselves, because, in ruining yourselves, you don't serve anybody else."

"That's precisely what I've been trying to make Harry understand," said Mr. Archibald.

Harry did seem to understand it at last, and said, as though the thought had suddenly entered his mind, that, should his sister want money before the term of the loan had expired, he could supply her wants. This simple expedient seemed to afford great consolation to Mr. Morton. He now resolved to see his sister without loss of time, and, on the spot, sent her an invitation to dine the following day at Russell Square.

The note was despatched, and the affair was apparently so far settled. Mr. Grant rose to depart. Leaning heavily on his stick with one hand, and holding his hat in the other, he addressed Mr. Morton,—

"I've often thought," said the venerable

man, “that Miss Morton is a young lady who need never want money. With her talents and education she may earn any amount of money.”

“I hope,” said Mr. Morton, stiffly, “my sister will never have occasion to work for her support whilst she has a brother, besides having property of her own.”

“Quite right, Harry, in one sense. I only spoke of literary occupation as an amusement for Miss Morton. I meet people of all grades, literary as well as commercial. There’s Mrs. Kickshaw, she earns 400*l.* a year. I sometimes do a bill for her husband ; she has shown me her receipts. If I were to give an opinion, which, perhaps, I’m not competent to, I should say Miss Morton is vastly superior to Mrs. Kickshaw.”

“I consider such a suggestion with regard to my sister an offence.”

Mr. Morton became very red, as he said this.

“Well, Harry,” said Mr. Archibald, “I don’t see any offence in the suggestion. I’ve written for the press, and I’ve been glad of a 10*l.*, aye, or of a 5*l.* note, independent of the pleasure of seeing myself in print. I worked hard before I came in for my property : I

work hard still, and am always glad to earn a few pounds."

"I didn't mean that," said Harry.

"I know; but Margaret is a clever woman. She was brought up on the same plan as I was. She has literary tastes like myself, and, if she has no objection, I don't see why she shouldn't display her talents."

"That's for herself to decide."

"Of course."

Miss Morton dined at Russell Square on the day following this conversation. She arrived before five by appointment, and had a long talk with her brother. Mr. Browne had spoken to her about having a bond for her money. She had no doubt it would be right and business-like, but, if it would embarrass her brother, she wouldn't consent.

"Besides," said Margaret, "if at the end of five and a half years you have the money, you'll give it me; and if you haven't it, all the bonds in the world couldn't make you give it."

"Oh, but, Meg, I shall have plenty of money then. Instead of 4,000*l.* I shall be able to give you 10,000*l.* You know I always said I would."

"I know, Harry, and I'm sure whilst you have money I shall never want any."

"You may be sure of that, Meg. Now tell me, are you happy at Miss Keel's?"

"Quite so."

"I wouldn't say anything to Miss Maunsell, or Mr. Wynum, or anybody about this matter."

"I never have mentioned it, Harry. Aunt expressly desired that we—that is Mr. Browne and I—should never speak of this money except to you or Richard. Harry, she trusted you implicitly. So do I."

"Oh, Margaret; what a woman aunt was!" Tears stood in his eyes as he said so. "And you're just like her."

Mr. Morton kissed his sister, and took her down to dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT ten days after the bond question had been arranged according to the fashion we have seen, Mr. Archibald, one morning, in the City office, said to his partner,—

“Harry, can you and Marie dine with me on Wednesday? I want you to meet Greathart and a few literary friends of mine. I have been speaking to Greathart about Margaret, and he agrees with me 'tis a pity a woman of her education and abilities shouldn't have an opportunity of showing what she can do. Everybody expects great things from her. I know nothing would delight her so much as to appear in print, even without payment.. 'Tis so with all people of literary tastes. However, you'll speak with Greathart; I'll prepare the way, and you'll introduce your sister.”

Miss Morton had never been invited to Mr.

Archibald's. That gentleman's wife had frequently on her return to London after her marriage, and whilst she was staying at an hotel, expressed a hope to see Margaret often when Richard should have concluded his negotiations about the villa; but, though the Archibalds had been established more than a year at Richmond, Margaret had not yet been invited to their house. She met them occasionally at Russell Square, and on the most friendly terms; but beyond such meetings there was no intimacy. When Mr. Morton was invited to Richmond to meet Mr. Greathart he felt greatly pleased by the zeal Richard displayed in forwarding Margaret's interests, and was quite elated by the prospects opening for her. Mr. Morton's imagination put no limits to the remuneration his sister was to obtain for the work of her pen.

The company assembled at Mr. Archibald's on the appointed Wednesday was very select. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Greathart there were Mr. and Mrs. Blazeby, the husband a gentleman connected with one of the leading journals, and the author of some works of repute. There was Mr. Moiry, who had written two works—one on the social condition of the negroes in America, and the other on the

moral condition of the agricultural whites in England. Both works had been quoted in the House of Commons at the time of publication, and quickly forgotten by all excepting the author.

After dinner the ladies walked in the grounds, and admired Mrs. Archibald's green-house and aviary and flower and fruit gardens. The gentlemen soon left the dining-room for the open air, and then Mr. Greathart and Mr. Morton walked and talked together.

Mr. Greathart had chosen literature as his profession, and had risen to a respectable eminence by the honest exercise of his talents. His friends were few. They were men of his own stamp, and knew how to appreciate the sterling gold of his character. Mr. Greathart was much courted, because he possessed much influence in the literary world. He might have frequented brilliant society, that of titled ladies and gentlemen who burn to see their names on a title-page, or at the head or tail of an article, and who are willing to pay handsomely the patient drudge that will put their thoughts or fancies into presentable shape. Mr. Greathart did not care for such society. He was in some respects a singular man. He would rather employ and pay the poor artist

from whom he could never expect an invitation to dinner than gratify the vanity of the rich would-be *littérateur*, who would have made him welcome to costly entertainments. Mr. Greathart had fought the battle of life manfully, had toiled through shade, had basked in sunshine, and had been cheered and blessed along his way in the companionship of a wife whose qualities were as genuine as his own.

On such a nature as Mr. Greathart's Miss Morton may be almost said to have a claim. She was a woman, and in difficulties; it was enough to command his services. She was able and willing to work; he could put her in the right way. Influenced by these feelings Mr. Greathart unhesitatingly accepted an invitation to dine with Mr. Morton on the following Saturday.

Henry Morton lost no time in making his sister aware of the friendly part Richard had acted, and advised her to talk freely to Mr. Greathart when they should meet on Saturday. Margaret did so, but she spoke also with much simplicity. She had manuscripts both in prose and in verse, but she did not suppose they were of any value. She had never published anything but verses, and that when she

was very young. It was agreed that Miss Morton should make a selection from amongst her manuscripts, and submit them to Mr. Greathart.

When Margaret began to examine her papers, she fell into a state of perplexity. She fancied some she had destroyed were far better than those she retained. However, she sent what she believed the best in her possession to Mr. Greathart, and waited his opinion tranquilly, without impatience and, it must be said, without hope. She could not expect—so she reasoned—that anything she had yet written could deserve Mr. Greathart's attention. Her hope was that she might some day write something worthy of being printed. Ten days passed, and no notice from Mr. Greathart beyond the acknowledgment of the receipt of the manuscripts, when one morning Margaret received a note which ran thus:—

“Kingston-on-Thames, Virginia Villa.

“MY DEAR MISS MORTON,—After looking over your MSS., I selected two translations from the German—one prose, the other verse, which I submitted to a friend well acquainted with the originals. He has highly approved of both; he has done more—he has promised to recommend

you to a publisher, who is just now doing a great deal in translations. Should you make an engagement, the employment will be remunerative.

“With regard to your other MSS., I have not yet been able to do anything. Some of the pieces in verse I find excellent. One of the prose tales I can get published in a magazine which, unfortunately, does not pay, the gratis contributions are so numerous. Of these matters we shall be able to talk more in detail, if you will favour Mrs. Greathart and myself with your company on Thursday. If you come by the train that leaves Waterloo at 12.45, we shall have time to show you some of the sights of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Greathart unites with me in kind regards.

“Sincerely yours,

“T. W. GREATHART.”

That was a pleasant day, the first Miss Morton passed at Kingston-on-Thames. That was an agreeable walk she had in the evening, when Mr. Greathart told her that in a few days she should receive a French manuscript for translating which she would be well paid ; and delightful were the thoughts that filled her mind on her homeward journey, as she pictured

herself, sitting all day at her desk, writing for the press—actually for the press—writing too, not on speculation, but for promised pay. How glad Harry would be ! Poor Harry !

And when the manuscript arrived, and several shillings were paid for carriage, Margaret experienced a kind of awe, as she lifted the heavy package. The magnitude of the work in which she was about to engage, and her responsibilities both to the foreign author and the reading English public, rose before her mind. A pleasing perturbation shook her spirit ; she was bewildered in delightful confusion. She sat down and looked as through a haze at the large brown-paper parcel that lay on the table. And when she undid the fastenings, she stared at the hundreds of pages with almost as much pride as a newly-found heir might gaze on his estates. But Margaret Morton had been trained to habits of self-control ; she had schooled herself, too, in the study of philosophic writers : the natural impetuosity of her character had been turned inwards, because of finding no external vent ; and she had made it a point of pride to curb all outward demonstration of sentiment. It was on principle, therefore, and through force of habit, that she now checked the commotion of her feelings, and

sternly resolved not to look through the packet for two days.

And when Margaret was in full work, how happy she felt. Amongst her many agreeable sensations, one rose prominently, and that was surprise at the ease with which she was able to proceed with her task. And now again with a gush of gratitude she thought of her uncle, and the pains he had taken to make her a good translator. She remembered how he had often told her that close translation at first and copious afterwards would be sure to lead to a correct and fluent style in her own language.

When at the end of a month Margaret received twenty pounds in payment for the first instalment of her work the entire circle of her acquaintance rejoiced. Miss Maunsell's credulity was taxed to its utmost limits by the stupendous result of Margaret's labours. She kissed the young writer, her eyes sparkling with delight. She could scarcely believe what "the dear child" told her. Who could think of her earning twenty pounds in a month! 'Twas quite a fortune—nearly three hundred a year; Miss Maunsell went on calculating Margaret's income at the rate of twenty pounds a month as a minimum for the rest of her life, and there might be an increase; Miss Maunsell

never thought of a diminution, still less of a total cessation of this income. Then she looked at the cheque, smiled her happiest smile, recommended Margaret to put it carefully into her purse, then, upon reflection, said she would take charge of it herself. And it was finally agreed that in the afternoon Margaret, accompanied by Miss Maunsell, should present the cheque for payment at the bank.

Though Miss Maunsell was surprised at the large amount awarded to Miss Morton for her month's labour, Miss Keel was far from sharing in the sentiment. She would not have been astonished had the honorarium been two hundred instead of twenty pounds, for Miss Keel's estimate of Margaret's capabilities was as high as her opinion of her own acquirements was low; and, as far as money was concerned, she knew no reason why her dear pupil should not be paid in the same ratio as Sir Walter Scott or Lord Lytton.

And how did Mr. Morton feel? Apart from the sentiment of fraternal pride—and he was proud of his sister—he now experienced a feeling of relief, the source of which he did not care to examine. His sister was able to realize an independence for herself—this was a tranquillizing fact. And then came forth a gush

of brotherly love and admiration from poor Harry's heart. He had another source of satisfaction in the reflection that Richard Archibald had been the chief instrument in placing Margaret in her present position. That showed genuine good feeling on Dick's part. It was real cousinly affection, and proved what he thought of Margaret, as Harry remarked to his wife.

Mr. Browne viewed Margaret's prospects in reference to her material interests. He banked the money, examined her cheque-book, advised her to put by her earnings until, with the little capital she had in hand, they should amount to a respectable sum, that, invested in good securities, would yield her an income. Mr. Browne said a great deal that might be construed to imply a doubt as to the probability of Margaret ever receiving the money lent to Morton, Archibald & Co.; but though a tone of doubt on this point pervaded Mr. Browne's remarks, he frequently repeated a hope that Harry would see justice done.

The spirit of Mr. Browne's remarks was not agreeable to Margaret. She had boundless confidence in her brother. Had he not promised to pay the money? As to his not being able, was he not a man of acknowledged

business capabilities? Margaret smiled as she asked these questions, and was amused at Mr. Browne's old-fashioned, cautious ways. But when the kind friend had taken his departure, Margaret, accustomed to rely on his judgment, could not help admitting there must be some grounds for his doubts; and then her sister's spirit rose with expanded wings, she longed to embrace her brother, and beg him not to think of the money. She wished she had ten thousand pounds in her hand that moment, that she might offer it to her brother as a free gift.

From this it may be deduced that Miss Morton was a young lady who did not set a very high value on money. Unfortunately, she did not understand the market value of the article, and was very far from estimating correctly how necessary is a certain portion for rendering our passage through life easy. As a result of this ignorance of the importance of the current coin of the realm in the management of our daily affairs, Miss Morton was far from being elated at the sight of her monthly cheques. To receive the wages of labour seemed to her degrading; to receive money for literary work looked mean. In Miss Morton's experience a practical know-

ledge of common things was wholly wanting. She had made to herself a worship of the ideal, and literature and art, in every branch, formed a portion of the mighty cathedral in which the object of her worship was enshrined. It was the epic grandeur of the vast nave, with vaulted dome, or it was the solid columns of sound philosophy that sustained the edifice, or it was the spiral wreaths of lyric poetry that coloured, in prismatic hues, the pointed windows, and tinged with kindly ray the gravestone of some ardent toiler, who lay within the side aisles, at a great distance from the shrine, perchance, but still within the precincts of the mighty pile. It was the breathings of genius in the sculptured marble, into which an existence had been infused that still continued, long after the brain that devised, the heart that felt, and the hand that fashioned, had mouldered into dust. Every species of literature and art, however limited might be the range of the artist, was held in esteem by Margaret Morton, and was with difficulty associated in her mind with monetary remuneration. She had yet to learn that, in modern life, talent of the highest order is brought into the market, and fetches a price according to the tariff.

Mr. Morton had informed his wife of his sister's good fortune, his wife had repeated the intelligence to her sister, who had already learned the news from her husband, and who now said, in her abrupt, vulgar way,—

“ All right. 'Tis better for us all to get Margaret out of the way. Don't you see that? ”

Marie did not see it at first, but after some explanation she understood it very well.

Miss Morton, being now in full work, rose every morning at five o'clock, took a cold bath, dressed, made a few turns in the little garden that lay at the back of Miss Keel's house, and at six sat down to her desk. She wrote for two hours, breakfasted at eight, read the *Times* according to established custom, walked for half an hour in the garden, and then read for an hour, again took up her pen, and wrote on steadily to a quarter to three. Fifteen minutes sufficed to make a change of dress for Miss Keel's three o'clock dinner. A hygeian rest after the meal, a walk, perchance some reading, and a chat with Miss Keel and mother, occupied the time to about six ; then an adjournment to Miss Maunsell's, home by nine, and in bed soon after ten. Such was now the daily routine of Miss Morton's life. Not a

moment was wasted. With a student's appreciation of the immense value of time, Margaret felt an elevated satisfaction in the consciousness that she was wisely employing that precious coin.

Everything was going on smoothly at St. John's Terrace. Miss Maunsell's evening receptions were punctually attended, the piano was always in tune, and Miss Keel was always ready to evoke its sweetest tones. Mr. Wynam, having within his reach all the home comforts he could expect, was contented.

The tranquillity of the little society over which Miss Maunsell presided was one morning gravely disturbed by a communication made by Mrs. Green to her first-floor lodger. It was to the effect that the house at St. John's Terrace was about being transferred to the landlady's niece, which young lady was about to change her name and assume that of a highly respectable young man not altogether unknown to Mrs. Green's patrons. This transfer of property and change of name would not, the landlady hoped, affect her lodgers. The highly respectable young man, who was about to become her nephew, would feel a pride in making them as happy as she had always done. This announcement took Miss Maunsell by surprise. She was accus-

tomed to Green, knew little of her niece, and could not hope that a young married landlady would wait on her as poor Green had done. Moved by these considerations, she said she would take time to reflect.

Mr. Wynum visited Miss Maunsell during her cogitations, and agreed with her that the threatened change might detract from the comfort of Mrs. Green's old lodgers. The more the question was debated, the less pleasing was the prospect opened, and an interview with the highly respectable young man, who assumed a rather lordly air in anticipation of his magisterial rights in the house, brought Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum to the conviction that a change of residence was unavoidable on their part. As a matter of course they would not leave the neighbourhood where they had lived so long, and where the few remaining members of their little circle resided. It was decided that Miss Maunsell should look for a new abode; but here a great difficulty arose. In looking for a new residence for herself, it was implied she was to find one for Mr. Wynum too. What would the world say? And yet she could not be so cruel as to cast off her fellow-lodger from the household partnership in which they had so long dwelt.

“But then,” she said to Mr. Browne, “strangers cannot understand the terms on which we have lived, and might put a false construction on our conduct.”

Mr. Browne was not insensible to such a possibility, and, after the lapse of a few days, told Miss Maunsell he had been thinking the matter over, and saw no better solution of the difficulty than that she and Mr. Wynum should both go to live with Miss Keel. Her house was large; she had given up her resident pupils; she was of a most amiable disposition. Miss Maunsell would be virtually mistress, and, over and above all, Margaret Morton would enjoy the constant companionship of her aunt’s old friend. Mr. Browne further suggested that all should live together as one family, having a common table. Both Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum were well pleased with this idea. Arrangements were easily made with Miss Keel, and at the expiration of the three months’ notice, necessitated by the terms of Mrs. Green’s agreement with her lodgers, Miss Keel’s domestic circle was considerably enlarged.

The pain Miss Maunsell felt at parting from “poor Green” was considerably alleviated, when in a private interview with that sagacious woman she discovered that the highly

respectable young man was bound by a legal instrument, duly signed and witnessed, to allow his future aunt a yearly stipend; and it further appeared that Mrs. Green was not surprised at Miss Maunsell's and Mr. Wynum's leaving. The new masters she knew could not fall into their ways. She was going herself, and, in addition to many other reasons for so doing, said she did not care to have a "man kind" morning, noon, and night in her kitchen.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was about the end of October when Miss Maunsell became uncomfortable about Mr. Wynum's health. He was not looking well ; his appetite was declining ; his favourite dishes did not tempt him to make a good dinner. To Miss Maunsell's sympathetic remarks and advice to have a doctor, he said he was a little out of sorts, but that in a few days he would be all right again. A few days passed, and, so far from being all right, Mr. Wynum was not a whit better. Still he saw no doctor ; but he breakfasted in bed for nearly a week, declaring at dinner he had done so solely in compliance with Miss Maunsell's request. A little longer and Mr. Wynum, one afternoon, said he had heard Miss Maunsell's medical attendant so highly spoken of that he should like to see the gentleman. The esteemed practitioner was speedily informed that his presence was desired, and that afternoon Dr. Sphinks alighted from

his carriage at Campden Terrace, and had an interview with Mr. Wynum.

Dr. Sphinks was a broad-shouldered man, above the middle height. His head was large ; his hair, which had retreated altogether from the front and top of his head, was, in the polar regions, where it still found place, iron-grey. His forehead, naturally high and broad, was made more striking by the baldness of his crown. His deep-set eyes were large and grey ; his step was slow, and his manner solemn.

Mr. Wynum belonged to the class of people that make the fortune of medical mannerists. He was a nervous man, and, having once resolved to see a medical practitioner, found a thousand ills to dilate on ; and when Dr. Sphinks, listening in silence and with a very grave face to the patient's narrative, occasionally traced some few words on a sheet of paper that lay open before him, Mr. Wynum was gratified by the attention he commanded ; but when the *Æsculapius* proceeded to talk of lungs, heart, and liver, the patient became uneasy. Finally Dr. Sphinks wrote a prescription and took leave, promising to call next morning about eleven, when he would make an examination with the stethoscope.

Nothing could exceed Mr. Wynum's discomfort after the doctor's departure. He discovered that his lungs were affected ; he wondered he had not known it before. His liver was evidently torpid : that accounted for all his symptoms. Before the expiration of an hour the seat of disease was pronounced to be his heart. Mr. Browne, who had never been ill in his life, listened in awe to these announcements, and almost fancied he saw Death peeping round the doorpost.

Miss Maunsell had waylaid Dr. Sphinks on the staircase, and was not a little alarmed by the solemn shake of the head that accompanied his replies to her inquiries ; but she was thrown into absolute terror when, having pressed the doctor to say distinctly what was the matter, he struck his cane heavily against the floor, compressed his lips, shook his head, and said, “ We'll pull him through, ma'am ; we'll pull him through.”

Miss Maunsell was a woman endowed by nature with good sense, and, but for the visions of romance that occasionally disturbed her imagination, would have presented to her friends a character without a flaw ; and now, believing Mr. Wynum to be in a dangerous condition, the woman stood forth, and Miss

Maunsell immediately assumed the feminine prerogatives of soothing, tending, and supporting an invalid. Stepping quickly into the drawing-room, she found Mr. Wynum lying on the sofa, and looking as though he thought it his duty to die instantly.

“Miss Maunsell, your friend finds me very ill.”

“My dear sir, I hope not; I’m sure not. Indeed, he told me he’d be able to pull you through.”

“Ah, Miss Maunsell, that pulling through is a terrible operation. I know what that means.”

Here Mr. Wynum closed his eyes. Poor Miss Maunsell was in a pitiable position. Her faith in Dr. Sphinks was unshakable; her reverence for his opinion too great to allow her to cast a doubt on a medical verdict pronounced by him. She sat down in view of the couch on which Mr. Wynum was lying. After a few minutes, she stole silently from the room, and soon returned bearing a tray, on which stood wine, cakes, and biscuits.

“My dear sir, pray take a glass of wine. My dear mother always said that under sudden depression of spirits a glass of wine was the best restorative. Allow me to persuade you.”

“Miss Maunsell, you’re very good.”

Mr. Wynum raised his head feebly from the pillow. He drank the glass of old port, and again leaned back. Miss Maunsell replenished the glass, which the patient again emptied ; the like movement was performed a third time, when, the generous fluid beginning to take effect, Mr. Wynum sat upright on the couch.

“Miss Maunsell, I beg your pardon ; I really beg your pardon.”

“My dear sir, don’t name it. Pray remain lying down ; you ’ll be more comfortable.”

Mr. Wynum took up the prescription written by Dr. Sphinks. Having carefully read the scrap, he laughed,—

“Really, Miss Maunsell, judging by this prescription, our friend the doctor will not, I should say, have much trouble in pulling me through. I find he orders me simply a carminative,—something to give the stomach a fillip.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so, my dear sir. Of course you understand all these things.”

“Yes, Miss Maunsell. No doctor can tell me more than I know. At the University anatomy was one of my favourite studies. I assure you, Miss Maunsell, I’ve cut up some bodies in my day.”

“Oh, how dreadful ! how dreadful !”

And Miss Maunsell pursed up her mouth, and tried to look grave; but she smiled, and that, too, with honest pleasure, for she saw Mr. Wynum's nervous fit was passing away.

Everybody in the house having been made acquainted with the lugubrious shadow cast by Dr. Sphinks's visit, each resolved to be as cheery as possible. Mr. Wynum, under the influence of nervous terror, ate at dinner more than he had eaten at any meal during the previous ten days. The good feeling that subsisted in that little household made each feel the burden of the others, and each endeavoured to lighten the load by every innocent device in his or her power. Miss Maunsell superintended the medical department, and, before dinner, presented to the invalid the prescribed draught, with a glass of wine. During dinner, Miss Morton gave an amusing account of the theft of a mutton chop, effected by a marauding cat, from the next-door larder, and which gave rise to a chase through the gardens, which ended in pursuing cooks and scullions, armed with brooms and sticks, being set at nought by the four-footed blacky, that, climbing on to the top of a wall, quietly devoured his prey in face of his exasperated pursuers. As Margaret possessed a happy

knack of telling such incidents with humour, her story awakened considerable mirth. Mrs. Keel gave a contribution after her fashion. She declared she had lost all faith in doctors, and believed their predictions generally meant the opposite of what was expressed; and this saturnine opinion, the offspring of nervous fretfulness, was more consolatory to Mr. Wynum than the wit or wisdom, or even the kindly cares, of the rest of the company. So, what with lively conversation, whist, and music, the evening passed pleasantly away for Mr. Wynum; but, as ten o'clock drew on, the prospect of a long, sleepless night rose before the nervous man, and the solemn shake of Dr. Sphinks's head again took a place in the foreground, and the dull thud of his gold-headed cane as it struck against the carpet was again heard. Mr. Wynum now made a great effort to be lively. He evidently wished to prolong the evening sitting. Would Miss Maunsell play another rubber? would Miss Keel try something on the piano? It was still early, he said: nobody could be fatigued.

Miss Maunsell and Mr. Browne, who knew something of Mr. Wynum's constitutional infirmity, declared their willingness to remain. Mr. Browne hinted somewhat about Margaret's

retiring. Mr. Wynum could not see the necessity ; remaining a little later than usual would be a change, and change was always beneficial. Margaret was willing to stay and take a hand at whist ; Miss Keel was delighted to have an opportunity of practising ; so all things went on merrily till half-past eleven, when a fresh surprise and pleasure were procured for the little party by the appearance of supper. The pendule on the mantel-piece marked twelve, but Mr. Wynum took no note of time ; he was busy praising everything on the table and everything in the room. At length Mr. Browne said he was sure Miss Maunsell would excuse his remarking that he had something private to say to Mr. Wynum. On this, the ladies immediately rose and left. It was long past two when the gentlemen separated.

Dr. Sphinks kept his eleven o'clock appointment punctually. He several times applied a stethoscope to the chest of the patient, and was apparently satisfied with the *râle*, as, with a contented grunt, he laid aside the trumpet-shaped tube, and proceeded to operate pugilistically on poor Mr. Wynum. He gave him some short, sharp blows on each clavicle, punched him heavily under the right ribs, and then coolly asked if he felt that. This conduct

looked all the more cowardly as the assailed was prostrate, and apparently helpless. But Mr. Wynum, so far from resenting being thus converted into a fleshy tambourine, smiled complacently when the doctor, tired of thumping and kneading, assured him he had no organic disease : functional derangement there certainly was ; “but,” said Dr. Sphinks, in his gruff way, “we’ll pull you through, sir ; we’ll pull you through.”

Miss Maunsell again waylaid the doctor on his downstairs journey, invited him into the drawing-room, and learned, to her great satisfaction, that the worst symptom about Mr. Wynum was his age. In retailing this opinion to Miss Morton, Miss Maunsell smiled shrewdly, and said she believed old age was an incurable malady ; and Margaret, entering into her friend’s humour, asked if Dr. Sphinks ever allowed a patient to die of old age.

Notwithstanding Dr. Sphinks’s bi-weekly visits, and notwithstanding his innocuous prescriptions, Mr. Wynum did not mend in health. He was languid ; his appetite was becoming every day less ; in short, he was suffering from general debility. Things had been going on in this way for a month, when it became undeniable that Mr. Wynum was really ill.

Miss Maunsell's nursing, supplemented by that of Miss Morton and Miss Keel, though most gratefully received, was not in itself absolutely restorative. A council of friends was held, at which Miss Maunsell, Mr. Browne, and Miss Morton assisted. A change to the seaside was suggested. It was also thought advisable that Mr. Wynum's friends in the North should be made acquainted with the state of his health ; but it would be first necessary to ascertain the invalid's wishes on these points. And then the question arose of who was to accompany him should he resolve upon going to the seaside. A female hand would be needed to smooth his pillow, but where was the lady to be found who would lend her hand under such circumstances ? The inquiry caused Miss Maunsell's large eyelids to fall, and induced a solemn silence. It was finally arranged that Mr. Wynum should be spoken with, and Mr. Browne was elected spokesman. The result of the conference, as reported by Mr. Browne, was that Mr. Wynum refused to entertain the propositions submitted to him. He did not like the seaside ; he did not wish to communicate with his relatives in the North. To cut the matter short, Mr. Wynum was resolved to stay where he was. This resolution was in one sense flattering to

the ladies who bestowed their nursing cares on him ; but it was also embarrassing, inasmuch as it increased the weight of their responsibilities. Dr. Sphinks, who saw from what point the wind was blowing, praised Miss Maunsell to the skies, and declared her care did more for the invalid than his medicines, which was quite true.

The case was still going on, the patient was not improving, when unexpectedly, and, indeed, unnoticed, another physician arrived. This was Dr. Nature, who entered uninvited, and, having effected a cure, departed unfeud. The *modus operandi* of this new practitioner would be pronounced unique by the faculty. It consisted in making an incision in the patient's leg, which, small at first, gradually became deeper and wider, and which made Dr. Sphinks shake his head slowly and persistently ; and finally the enlarging wound, combined with other symptoms, so far influenced the learned doctor that he requested an interview with Miss Maunsell, and formally confided to her his opinion that Mr. Wynam's life was drawing to a close,—that his constitution was “breaking up.” Miss Maunsell received the intelligence with a feeling more profound than sadness, she received it with awe. After bowing the

doctor to the door, she sent in hot haste for Mr. Browne, upon whom the mournful intelligence made a deep impression. After much cogitation and many sorrowful remarks about the fresh break that was about to be made in their little circle, and many affectionate allusions to the fractures that had already occurred, it was agreed that Mr. Browne should speak with Mr. Wynum, avoiding, if possible, to make him acquainted with the leech's opinion, but using every endeavour to obtain permission to write to his relatives in the mysterious North, as well as to his son in India. It was a severe task imposed on Mr. Browne, but he dared not shift the responsibility. He said so to Miss Maunsell, who had traced his path of duty with a steady hand ; but he did venture to insinuate that a lady might, with delicate tact, prepare the way and dispose his friend's mind for the reception of what he had to say. The hint was well received, and Miss Maunsell, always glad to be installed in office, went immediately to the drawing-room, where Mr. Wynum was reclining in an easy-chair. With hums and haws, and looks of solemn import, the lady entered on her ambassadorial duties ; but Mr. Wynum, quickly divining the significance of these portents, taxed her with the object of

her mission, and poor Miss Maunsell, with many a “Well, my dear sir,” was forced to admit that Dr. Sphinks had spoken ominously of Mr. Wynum’s state, and, having admitted so much, the good lady expatiated, with sighs and groans, upon the uncertainty of human life and the necessity of arranging one’s affairs. Mr. Wynum, instead of being depressed, rose, so to speak, to the occasion, and, casting aside all formality, told Miss Maunsell no doctor was needed to tell a man when he was dying. His own feelings would inform him ; and he further added that Sphinks was a fool.

Mr. Browne having learned the result of Miss Maunsell’s interview with “our dear invalid,” believed his services to be unneeded, and left the house without having seen Mr. Wynum. He returned in the evening, and learned that the patient was very lively, had insisted on dining with the family, had enjoyed his dinner, and was looking with anxiety for Mr. Browne’s arrival that the old game of whist might be carried on. Mr. Browne merely remarked,—

“Wynum was always a wonderful man.”

It was evident Mr. Wynum was resolved not to die, and it was equally plain he wished to

show his friends he was as much alive as ever. But Mr. Wynum was fighting against great odds, and was fighting, too, against his friends. Doctor Nature would not be controlled: the incision he had made was becoming every day larger, was discharging matter, and required to be plastered and poulticed. Mr. Wynum was alarmed—too much frightened to dare avow his fears; and Doctor Nature still went on, operating after his fashion, until the patient, not understanding the treatment, yielded to his friend Browne's entreaties, and consented to call in a medical man, because, on the day when Mr. Wynum had pronounced Dr. Sphinks to be a fool, he had written that gentleman a note, enclosing a fee, and declining his further visits. Still, though Mr. Wynum promised to submit his case to a fresh doctor, he delayed to carry the promise into effect. Mr. Wynum was now an enthroned invalid. He was the focus to which the thoughts of an entire household tended. He was the object of Miss Maunsell's active housewifely cares; for him Miss Keel kept her piano in tune, and played and sang through long hours; for him, Miss Morton curtailed her sleep, and rose an hour earlier, or retired to rest two hours later than customarily, that, having completed her allotted portion of

literary work, she might sit and talk with Mr. Wynum. As to Mr. Browne, he wished he could become an invalid, could he reckon on such attentions as Mr. Wynum received; but Mr. Browne was too humble-minded to believe *he* could ever become an object of woman's fond devotion, at the same time taking it quite as a matter of course that his friend should be, but Mr. Browne said within himself Wynum had always possessed the art of fascinating women.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It wanted only three days to the festival of the Great Nativity. The shops of Kensington were bedecked with their annual Christmas ornaments. Indulgent parents might be seen conducting their children to toy-repositories, at whose doors wooden horses suspended by the feet, chariots tied up by the wheels, regiments of soldiers fastened down in boxes, and similar attractions, fixed the eyes of the juveniles. In every street might be seen indications of coming festivity. Housewifely matrons of the humble class were scouring down their houses, or, having completed such lavations, were decking their walls with the traditional holly and ivy and the historical mistletoe. Even to the imprisoned work-house inmates the coming of Christmas brought a prospect of better cheer, and the miserable room-keeper, who had not yet secured the price of a Christmas dinner for his wife and children, he, too, looked with hope to the great anniversary.

There was one house in Kensington to which the approach of Christmas brought neither joy nor hope. This was Miss Keel's. All the inmates of that abode were now convinced that Mr. Wynum's remaining days were numbered and would be very few. Spite of every friendly effort of those about him, the long, dreary December nights and the short, cheerless days o'ermastered the invalid. Too nervous to remain in bed, he rose, but unrefreshed, with the first glimpse of the morning light, and descended to the breakfast-room. Here he drank a cup of tea, in which Miss Morton had beaten up an egg, and then dozed off in an easy-chair, woke after a short interval, had another cup of tea with some toast, made an effort to look at the *Times*, which he finally transferred to Miss Morton, who was his morning reader, and who contrived to amuse him for an hour or two, when he would again lapse into slumber. At intervals during the day he would throw off this drowsiness, and appear for a while somewhat like his ancient self; but each succeeding day the effort became more feeble, the effect more transient. It seemed as if the thread of Mr. Wynum's life was interwoven with the hours of that year, and that both must terminate together.

In addition to the prospective loss of their friend, Miss Maunsell and Mr. Browne experienced an uneasy sense of responsibility in regard to Mr. Wynum's family. The invalid had given Miss Maunsell to understand that he and his brother had differed on some little points during his last visit to the North; but, as Miss Maunsell remarked to Mr. Browne, that was no reason why the family should not be communicated with when his illness had assumed so serious an aspect. Mr. Wynum had also absolutely forbidden that any one should write to his son without his permission. The position was most perplexing, as Miss Maunsell remarked to Mr. Browne, and that gentleman quite agreed with her.

To no one within Mr. Wynum's immediate circle did the prospect of his coming dissolution cause so much emotion as to Miss Morton. In his society, since they had come to live under the same roof, she had enjoyed the intellectual sympathy which to natures like hers is a necessary of life. In Mr. Wynum she had found more than a sympathizer with her intellectual tastes. She had received from him direction and guidance in the higher branches of her studies. Mr. Wynum, in recommending for Miss Morton's reading a

metaphysical work, would take a survey of the author's views, and show how far he had sustained them, and in what he had fallen short ; and this he did with a coolness of judgment that might almost be described as mechanical, so absolutely was it free from prejudice. Margaret Morton appreciated the advantages she derived from Mr. Wynum's society. She saw he was doing for her what her uncle would have done had he been spared to carry out his plans for her education. She felt grateful for these services ; she was happy in the enjoyment of this intellectual pabulum, till Mr. Wynum's mode of proceeding made her believe he wished to make her his wife. The drift of his observations, though too clear to be misunderstood, was far too vague to be capable of reduction to geometrical demonstration. Disturbed by the impressions thus made, Miss Morton had for some time felt uncomfortable in her relations with Mr. Wynum, but that gentleman's subsequent masterly management so completely restored Margaret's tranquillity that she began to doubt whether she had ever had justifiable grounds for suspicion. Besides, she had wished to forget, she had wished to feel again as of yore, and she had relapsed into the docility of the admiring pupil in pre-

sence of her master. But now Mr. Wynum was dying; and Margaret Morton, sitting in her own room with locked door, thought of what he had been to her. And thus, locked in solitude, she reviewed her position. Death had deprived her of her aunt, as of her uncle; marriage had taken away her brother; all her family ties were severed. She stood alone in the world, and unloved; not quite unloved, for Miss Maunsell, Miss Keel, and Mr. Browne loved her, but she was unappreciated, except by Mr. Wynum. And the evidence which Margaret had rejected as ridiculous when it came self-adduced as proofs of Mr. Wynum's wish to make her his wife, now stood forth in unshaded light to show he loved her.

Margaret Morton was not, in the common acceptation of the term, a marrying woman. She had not been brought up to regard catching a husband as the highest aim of woman's existence. Carefully excluded from all such vulgar teachings, her heart had retained its virgin purity, whilst her intellect had been cultivated and strengthened. So far from seeking to marry, Miss Morton shunned such a tie, partly through a romantic wish to be free, because she believed that only in the freedom of single life could she indulge the studious

habits to which her natural dispositions rendered her inclined, and which custom had confirmed ; partly, too, from a latent ambition to distinguish herself—as she secretly hoped she one day might—in the literary world. Brought up as she had been, associating constantly with a woman so refined as her aunt, and with men so learned and accomplished as her uncle and Mr. Wynum, Miss Morton, whilst receiving higher mental culture than the generality of her sex, had insensibly imbibed sentiments of lofty romance. Taught from childhood upwards to respect herself, and be a law to herself, she had learned to form a very high idea of her sex in general.

Had Richard Archibald corresponded fully to the desires of his uncle and aunt, Margaret Morton's course in life might have been very differently shaped. But she had never loved him with a distinct and personal affection, nor did she understand, till after they had been irrevocably separated, how she could have loved him, loved him with all the strength of her intellect and all the tenderness of her heart. But Richard Archibald had never been the direct object of such affection ; and the sudden wrench that had shattered not alone their friendship, but their acquaintance, had

substituted in Miss Morton's mind, with regard to her *ci-devant* cousin, instead of love, a lofty scorn and contempt.

Miss Morton, sitting, as we have said, in her room with locked door, mourned for Mr. Wynum as no other did. She recalled the artless love of Cornet Wynum, and she saw the profound though timid devotion of Monsieur Claude; but Margaret Morton was a worshipper of intellect, her love could only be given to a man she could acknowledge her superior. The disparity of years between her and Mr. Wynum did not enter into her present estimate, for there was now no question of marriage, and Margaret Morton, sitting in solitude, contemplated with feelings of a many-hued sorrow the approaching death of the intellectual and learned man who had appreciated and loved her.

It is easy to fancy with what sentiments Miss Morton now waited on Mr. Wynum, how tenderly she dressed the wounded limb, how frequently she shook up the pillows of his easy-chair or couch, coaxed him to eat, and fed him when he was too languid to make the exertion himself.

Christmas Day arrived. Mr. Wynum spent the afternoon in the drawing-room, occupying alternately an easy-chair or a couch. At an

early hour he partook of an invalid dinner: he was far too feeble to join the family party, over whom the consciousness of his state cast a heavy gloom. No one strove to be cheerful; no healths were drunk, no toasts were given. Miss Maunsell, Miss Morton, and Mr. Browne commemorated in their hearts memories to which, they believed, another would soon be added. So passed Christmas Day. It passed as pass the Christmas Days of elderly people, on whom the rising generation makes no special claims. It drifted into the abyss of the past, and there was no representative of the hopeful future there, to cast a sunset glow of splendour on its disappearance.

Amongst Mr. Wynum's New Year's visitors was Mrs. Green. She told in general terms how it was by chance she had come to town at all. Her niece had invited her for Christmas, but as she was living entirely to herself, a lone woman, and did not care for coming where there was any man kind, she had refused; but just about Christmas Eve something occurred, and she came to town quite by chance. Of course she inquired for Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum, and was told they were quite well; for her niece, who was just like herself, and never troubled about what was going on out-

side, knew nothing of Mr. Wynum's illness. And Mrs. Green might have known nothing of it either, but that by chance she met Miss Keel's servant, from whom she learned the distressing intelligence.

Having thus accounted for her visit, Mrs. Green listened attentively to all the symptoms of Mr. Wynum's malady, as detailed by the invalid himself. Having heard the case to the end, Mrs. Green told the gentleman she had often seen him quite as ill—an assertion very gratifying to all present—and finished by delivering her opinion, which was to the effect that Mr. Wynum need not look for much improvement in his health before spring, but that as the days grew longer he would grow stronger.

Though Mrs. Green's knowledge may have been only empirical, it certainly proved to be correct. The improvement in Mr. Wynum's health began in January, and progressed so rapidly that in February he was convalescent. The spirit of spring had breathed new life into his frame, and he now walked lightly on the earth, into which he had so lately seemed on the point of making a final step. Like the mighty Titan, his close approximation to our great mother had apparently infused fresh

vigour into his existence. He stepped forth a new man. The colour became healthier and more diffused on his cheek, his eye looked black, clear, strong, and smiling as Miss Maunsell, standing at a little distance in front of him, lifted up her hands and nodded her head in affectionate banter.

Mr. Wynum one morning left the house early—it was scarcely eleven o'clock—having announced at breakfast that he should not dine at home. Miss Maunsell looked after him from the window.

"Good gracious! How stoutly he walks! He's quite himself again. I protest, he hasn't taken a cab. Can he think of walking into town? And how sprucely he's dressed!"

"He's thinking of getting married," said Mrs. Keel, who on this bright April morning had already been wheeled in her easy-chair into the drawing-room.

Miss Maunsell looked at her. "Nonsense, Mrs. Keel! He'll never marry, he's not thinking of anything of the kind."

"Take my word, Miss Maunsell, lie is; and take my word, before six months you'll see Mr. Wynum married."

Miss Maunsell's face flushed red as scarlet; her lips pursed themselves into a pouting smile.

"Nonsense, Mrs. Keel ! what do you mean ?"

"I mean Mr. Wynum wants to marry Miss Morton, and he 'll do it too."

"What nonsense ! He 's old enough to be her grandfather."

"No matter, he 'll marry her. Sitting here in my chair, I see everything, more than people that run about the house."

Miss Maunsell looked blank. Her colour and vivacity subsided at once.

"Mark my words, they 'll be married," went on Mrs. Keel in her low tone and emphatic manner ; "they 'll be married."

Miss Maunsell, without making a reply, went straight to her room, locked the door on the inside, and sat down in her easy-chair. Her first feelings were very like those of wounded vanity ; but her common sense triumphed, and she began to take a rational view of the case. Was it possible that Margaret would marry Mr. Wynum ? Could she so sacrifice herself ? And there was Monsieur Claude, a charming young man, suited to Margaret in age. And there was Cornet Wynum. How dreadful to think his father would oust him ! But the idea was ridiculous, preposterous ! Poor old Mrs. Keel was doting. Miss Maunsell was about to rise from her chair, having dismissed the matter

from her mind, when a sudden thought intervened. What was Mr. Wynum not capable of; what was he not able to do, if he only willed it? And did he will this? Miss Maunsell hesitatingly resolved to wait and watch, and, if she saw danger, to put Margaret on her guard.

Mrs. Keel's remarks had the effect of making Miss Maunsell resolve to hasten the realization of a scheme which she had hitherto left to the natural course of events. This was nothing else than a marriage between Monsieur Claude and Margaret. She knew Madame Charleroi's sentiments, and was convinced there would be no difficulty in opening negotiations, and of bringing them to the desired issue, as far as the French family were concerned.

A visit to Clapham was the first step projected by Miss Maunsell; and as she did not wish for witnesses, she very cleverly, as she thought, assumed at breakfast that Margaret was too busy to sacrifice an entire day, and Mr. Wynum, as yet, not strong enough to commence a journey immediately after breakfast. Both suppositions were confirmed by the persons concerned. Miss Maunsell set forth on her expedition. Miss Morton and Mr. Wynum remained in the drawing-room.

“I wish to speak with you, Margaret.”

“Yes, Charles ?” and she looked up.

Mr. Wynum paused, seemed a little embarrassed, and went on slowly,—

“At the point which our relations with each other have reached, I feel I ought to let you know the exact condition of my pecuniary affairs. I think, in fact, I ought to let you know the precise amount of my income.”

“I never thought of it,” said Margaret.

“I’ve no doubt of that, my dear; but a gentleman is bound in honour before he marries to make a candid avowal of his circumstances to the lady he proposes to make his wife. I cannot make you a brilliant settlement, Margaret.”

“I don’t want any.”

“But, my dear, I shall do all I can for you. My father, as I suppose you have heard, was an extensive manufacturer in the North. At his death, I inherited a third of his property ; the remainder was divided between my two brothers. I had no taste for business ; my tastes were studious. My brother Tom was a man of business, cool and plodding. Ned was something like me ; he wasn’t suited for business. Tom bought us both out of the concern. I’ve no doubt he gave us a fair valuation for

our shares ; but he has since made a gigantic fortune. He and I have never got on well. I entered the University. I studied : I may say, without vanity, I distinguished myself. I frequented the best society—I mean the most refined and intellectual ; that's what I call the best. To move in such a circle involves considerable expenditure of money, and that, too, without the slightest extravagance. My fortune, though respectable, was not colossal. The interest did not suffice for my expenses : I was obliged to draw on the principal. From time to time I had disagreeable collisions with my brother Tom. His is the soul of a trader. Some years ago, in consequence of domestic losses and afflictions which gave my health a great shock, I became estranged from society, and settled down here. My expenditure had been increased by the demands of illness in my family, and, with the greater portion of my remaining capital, I bought a life annuity."

Here Mr. Wynum paused, and cast a side glance at Margaret, who looked back steadily at him and said,—“ Well ? ”

“ Well, Margaret,” went on the narrator, slowly, his eyes cast down, “ you see 'tis not in my power to make you a large settlement.

Something I can do. I can sell my annuity, and with the product buy one for both our lives. You're disappointed, Margaret?"

He looked steadily at her. She was looking straight at the opposite wall.

"I'm not disappointed,"—and she laughed—“I assure you, Charles. I never considered whether you had money or not. Besides, a woman has no claim to a settlement when she brings her husband no fortune but—”

“Tut, tut, my dear. A man's first consideration should be to make a provision for his wife. I'm not a man to seek money by marriage,—I never was.”

“But I have some money; at least, Harry has it. Aunt left it me. Mr. Browne knows all about it. I *do* wish Mr. Browne were here. We haven't seen him for months. But I really have some money; at least, I'm entitled to it.”

“I'm glad to hear it, my dear. Your aunt had only a life interest in her income, and she lived up to what she had. What she has left you you'll find use for some day. But of this be assured, Margaret, I'll do all I can for you. We shall call on my brokers to-morrow.”

“But,” said Margaret, “even though I should never get the money aunt left me, I

should be able to support myself. My magazine articles alone defray my monthly expenses. What I get for the heavy work I put by."

"Bravo, Margaret, bravo! I didn't know this."

"No; I never tell my business. I'm not fond of talking about myself."

"Well and wisely said. Neither do I tell my affairs. You're the only one, except my brokers, who knows the exact state of my income."

"You've behaved very honourably in telling me everything so candidly."

"My dear Margaret, 'twould be the height of folly in a man who is about to marry to conceal the state of his pecuniary affairs from the lady. He's sure to be found out afterwards, which may lead to much unpleasantness."

"Harry will tell you all about my money," said Margaret, blushing very much.

"My dear Margaret, I know all about it."

"Do you?" said Margaret, looking straight in his face.

"All, Margaret, all—everything." And Mr. Wynum patted her head. "Make your mind easy; I know everything."

It was a great relief to Margaret Morton to

learn that Mr. Wynum knew all about the money belonging to her that was lodged in her brother's firm. Thinking of that money had been a perpetual source of disquiet to her since she had become formally engaged to Mr. Wynum. She knew it was a duty to tell the man she was about to marry what property she really possessed; but, when preparing to make the disclosure, she saw how serious would be the consequences to the house of Morton, Archibald & Co. should the partners not be able to satisfy the demands of him to whom she was about to give a legal right to dictate to her. The bond talked of by Mr. Archibald had never been executed, Miss Morton taking it for granted that her brother and his partner would pay the money when in a position to do so; and, should they never be able to pay, a bond, as far as she was concerned, would be useless.

In compliance with Mr. Wynum's request, Miss Morton accompanied him into the City, and in an interview with his broker learned the exact value of his life annuity; not as to amount—that she knew before—but as to marketable worth. Mr. Wynum persisted in wishing to sell, and purchasing a joint annuity for himself and future wife; but the broker having

dilated on the great sacrifice that would be made in reinvesting, because of the disparity in the ages of the annuitants, if indeed a purchaser could be found in the first instance, Miss Morton declared she would not sanction the sale, and, as far as her authority went, she forbade it. Mr. Wynum was very much gratified, and said her conduct was very high-minded.

Miss Maunsell had never been happier than she was at this juncture. Her intimacy with Madame Charleroi was becoming daily closer. Her first visit to Clapham was quickly returned by her friend, whose handsome brougham and high-stepping bays looked very stylish in front of Miss Keel's house. Madame Charleroi kissed Miss Morton with matronly grace, and thereby annoyed Mr. Wynum excessively. Between Miss Maunsell and Madame Charleroi a tacit understanding was established. They knew that nothing could be more agreeable to either than the marriage of Monsieur Claude with Miss Morton, and each assumed that the young people would be made supremely happy by the union. Madame Charleroi sincerely admired Miss Morton; she understood, or thought she understood, her son's feelings towards the young lady, and so, whilst per-

fectly confident that she was working out the dearest wish of Monsieur Claude's heart, she enjoyed at the same time the satisfaction, so dear to her French feelings, of knowing she was the promoter of a marriage which would be one both of *convenance* and of inclination.

Miss Maunsell, happy in being the architect in chief of a glittering matrimonial edifice, became lavish in her caresses of Margaret. Of an evening, she often petted and fondled her, called her "dear child," and hoped soon to see her in her own house. Margaret, thinking Miss Maunsell suspected the true state of things, blushed and became embarrassed. Her confusion delighted her old friend, who nodded knowingly at Mr. Wynum as though she would say, "I'll make her happy yet; I'll arrange everything."

The confidings thus cast at Mr. Wynum, through the medium of nods and smiles, were far from pleasing to the gentleman for whom they were meant; and when Miss Maunsell, one evening, partly in soliloquy, partly in an address to the company in general, declared nothing was more beautiful than to see two young people united, to see them commence the journey of life together, and go on, helping and supporting one another, an honour to

their parents and a comfort to their friends, her remarks had the effect on Mr. Wynum of putting him in such a frame of mind as we may suppose a man to be who is whetting a dagger, previous to going out to waylay an enemy.

Mr. Wynum was now in a state of chronic irritation. He spoke of the Charlerois as tradespeople, and affected to look down on them. Miss Maunsell, too, was under ban. He no longer cared for her society, and told Margaret he intended his wife should move in a very different circle. Margaret, who read the reasons of Mr. Wynum's ill-humour, was indulgent; but his persistence during nearly three weeks in this style of remark not only tried her patience, but raised doubts as to the possibility of living comfortably with a man of such wayward humour. One day, as Mr. Wynum and Miss Morton were returning from a short walk in Kensington Gardens, they perceived a brougham in the high road. In it were Madame Charleroi and Miss Maunsell. Madame Charleroi pulled the check-string and made a movement of invitation with her hand to Miss Morton and her companion.

Mr. Wynum made an abrupt and almost angry gesture declining the invitation, and the brougham drove off.

"Miss Morton certainly devotes herself to her aunt's old friend," said Madame Charleroi. "She couldn't do more for him were he her father."

"Well, my dear madame, in one sense we may say he is a father to her; and she's such a kind creature"—this the self-appointed diplomatist thought a clever stroke—"she'd be kind to any one, especially to one whose health is not good."

The disappearance of the brougham had an invigorating effect on Mr. Wynum. He now walked strongly on, and, so far from leaning on his umbrella, he twirled that article in his hand, occasionally striking the air, as if knocking down an imaginary foe. Mr. Wynum felt he was master of the situation; he was thinking thoughts of authority.

"When we're married"—he spoke without looking at Margaret—"you'll cut all these people. That old Maunsell is intolerable; and as for the French people, you'll be too much their superior in rank to associate with them."

"I'll never give up Miss Maunsell's acquaintance," said Margaret, calmly,—"she was my aunt's oldest and truest friend; and as for the Charleroises, they're most amiable,—they've always been most kind to me. I never expect

to be raised to such a rank as to be able to look down on them, even if I wished it."

Margaret paused, evidently suppressing something to which she felt tempted to give utterance.

"When a woman of rational mind," said Mr. Wynum, "and of religious principles contracts a matrimonial engagement, she is supposed to have reflected on the obligations she incurs to love, honour, and obey."

"You're quite right," said Margaret, stopping short; "and when a woman finds she cannot fulfil such obligations, she ought to withdraw from them. Mr. Wynum, I give you back your promise, and I retract my own."

"Pooh! pooh! Women are hasty, because they're frivolous."

The pair walked on, Margaret no longer leaning on Mr. Wynum's arm, and that gentleman pacing the well-swept walk of the gardens as though he had never needed support for his faltering steps. In this fashion the two reached Campden Terrace. Mr. Wynum entered the dining-room; Margaret ran upstairs. She hurried into her own room, locked the door, and flung herself into an easy-chair. What was her first feeling? Relief. Yes, she felt relieved of a burden whose weight she did not

estimate correctly till it was removed. The yoke of her engagement had become intolerably galling, and now it was lifted off.

The dinner-bell rang, and Margaret descended to the dining-room with a light step and a tranquil spirit. There she found Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum, discoursing on apparently the best terms. Mr. Wynum had been lamenting, in his softest manner, that he had not been able to pay his respects to her and Madame Charleroi in the morning, when they kindly ordered their carriage to stop. A sudden indisposition, a kind of faintness, had seized him, and obliged him to hurry to the nearest seat. Miss Maunsell, easily won to pity, had expressed her sympathy and concern, and said how Madame Charleroi had wished to give him a seat in her carriage, and how Monsieur Claude had alighted, intending to resign his place. Mr. Wynum had divined the proposed kindness, but felt at the moment that the motion and closeness of a carriage would be too much for him. Then Mr. Wynum, smiling languidly, leaned back in his chair, looked at Miss Maunsell, and feared he was doing little credit to her long and patient nursing. Who could listen unmoved to gratitude so delicately expressed? Certainly not Miss Maunsell. The

good lady was profoundly touched, and when Mr. Wynum ceased to speak, and reclined with half-closed eyes in his chair, she hurried out of the room, and returned quickly with a glass of sherry, which she prevailed on her late nursling to swallow. Happily, he revived, and in low tones, and the most graceful manner, thanked his “generous and ever-faithful friend.” Miss Maunsell was happy. Margaret found her friends in this happy mood. Mr. Wynum, throughout dinner, devoted himself exclusively to Miss Maunsell. He not alone ignored Margaret, Mrs. and Miss Keel, but, with an adroitness peculiarly his own, he was able—so to speak—to suppress them, allowing the poor worms only as much space as he was pleased to grant. Margaret smiled in quiet thoughtfulness as she noted these traits of character, and, it must be confessed, enjoyed the dinner all the more because of being relieved of the task of humouring her very exacting lover, now no longer such.

The whist party that evening was delightful to Miss Maunsell; not that she won many games, she scarcely won at all, though her losses did not arise from want of good cards, but because that her partner’s insinuating flattery had rendered her spirits too volatile to

allow her to fix her attention on cares so trivial as that of winning the odd trick. Margaret was still ignored by Mr. Wynum, and absolutely forgotten, as was the rest of the company, by Miss Maunsell. Mr. Wynum was carrying out his policy with a high hand. He did not, for a moment, believe that Margaret seriously intended to withdraw from her engagement, so he wished to punish her for what he called a manifestation of temper. Mr. Wynum, when in possession of authority, was accustomed to wield it unsparingly. However, as his power over Miss Morton had not yet attained the marital character, he was obliged to manœuvre a little. Like a skilful general, he wished to have his reserve well placed, and, as Miss Maunsell was the reserve in this case, it was not difficult to bring her to the desired point. The object of all this display of tactics was to show Margaret how well she could be done without; but Mr. Wynum, like many great tacticians and diplomatists, though he attained his aim, brought about a result very different from what he had anticipated or desired. Margaret, so far from being annoyed at seeing Mr. Wynum able to make himself happy independently of her, felt pleased that it was so. She did not experience the remorse or, at

least, the discomfort she might have felt, had her dissevered lover exhibited pain or depression of spirits. He was able to amuse himself with his little game of whist, and divert himself with an innocent flirtation with Miss Maunsell. Margaret's joy in her recovered freedom was consequently unrestrained, and she fell back with thankfulness into her natural or, at least, long-acquired mood of mind. She retired into the domain of her own thoughts, and there peacefully recreated herself.

Five days passed. Miss Maunsell was supremely happy nursing Mr. Wynum, who was doing the semi-demi invalid. Miss Maunsell, in her devotedness to this exquisite hospital practice, abjured or forgot her customary confabulations and drives with Madame Charleroi, to whose affectionately penned inquiries as to the cause of her absence Miss Maunsell wrote back that for the moment domestic cares, of a pressing character, kept her at home. This tone of answer was instigated by Mr. Wynum, who had no wish to see Madame Charleroi and her son hurrying down in charitable solicitude, were any indisposition of his alleged as the cause of Miss Maunsell's defalcation in the matters of gossip and drives in the Park.

The sight of Mr. Wynum, happy in Miss

Maunsell's society, the very stateliness of his manner, even the sarcasms he launched at herself, afforded Margaret a certain satisfaction, inasmuch as they served to prove how little he missed her, and how well he could do without her. So Margaret spent much of her time in her own room, writing or reading, and not without a kind of exultation in the reactionary feelings induced by her redeemed liberty. She gradually fell completely back into that inner world where she was queen and mistress, and where she soared, on the wings of young aspiration, far above the stateliest trees in Kensington Gardens, where she took her afternoon promenade, and where she ran no risk of meeting Mr. Wynum, that gentleman, in the advanced days of his dudgeon, disporting himself in a carriage in the neighbourhood of Regent Street and Pall Mall, where he made believe to have important calls to make.

One afternoon, as Margaret was returning from her customary walk in the gardens, she met Monsieur Claude, who told her he had only come to town on the previous day, having business to transact for his father. Whilst this and other information was being given, Monsieur Claude had turned, and was walking by Margaret's side, both going in the direction of

Campden Terrace. Margaret, with the independence of spirit belonging to a self-supporting member of society, had invited him to accompany her. Walking in this way, the conversation of these young people turned on literature, and Monsieur Claude avowed he had commenced the study of German. He had had some lessons from a professor during his last visit to Paris, and had since been reading alone. He was, he said modestly, delighted with Schiller, but often met with difficult passages. Arriving at Campden Terrace, Margaret repeated with frank good nature her invitation to call in the evening, when they should read some pages of Schiller together. And when Monsieur Claude blushed, and said something about giving her so much trouble, Margaret declared it was a pleasure to read the classical ballads of the German poet.

Monsieur Claude turned his steps towards the point of the compass in which his dinner lay, but it would be doing the gentleman injustice to suppose that material meat and drink engaged his thoughts. So far was such from being the case that the appetite he had brought from home, and which he had purposed to increase by a constitutional stroll in the gardens, was now so much diminished as

scarcely to possess an existence. The meeting with Miss Morton, and reflections consequent thereon, had completely put to flight all thoughts of dinner, and had substituted in their stead sentiments too ethereal to be understood by any but a gentleman of the like temperament, and placed in similar circumstances.

Madame Charleroi had not made to her son, either in her maternal or official character, any communication respecting the negotiations that were being carried on between herself and Miss Maunsell, and which they thought wise to keep secret for the moment; but, as neither lady was endowed with stony stolidity of countenance, and as neither possessed the accomplishment of silence in the perfection that shuns the furthest boundary of the prohibited subject, or any track that may lead thereto, it was impossible that Monsieur Claude should not have imbibed some idea of what was going on, and dreamed day-dreams, and seen noon-day visions, of a character and colouring that lifted the seer far above all meaner things. Monsieur Claude, in this way, came to know something of what was going on, and to imagine the rest; and all the while Madame Charleroi was protesting to Miss

Maunsell she would not for worlds that her son should suspect anything of their project. Claude was so sensitive, and his feelings for Miss Morton were of a character so profound, she feared to agitate him, even by a whisper, till everything should be fully arranged. Miss Maunsell quite sympathized with Madame Charleroi. She would not on any account have Monsieur Claude's mind excited by premature intelligence; and, if sensitive about his feelings, how much more so would she naturally be about dear Margaret's! And so, with mutual vows of secrecy, and with the best intentions in the world of observing them, the two diplomatists allowed their designs to ooze out by indications in the form of smiles and nods, illustrated by stray words that shed a glare, brilliant as gas, on the whole train of negotiations.

Monsieur Claude's mind was in the condition we have indicated, when, in consequence of Miss Morton's invitation, he entered Miss Keel's drawing-room, where he was received with much warmth by Miss Maunsell, with honest frankness by Margaret, and with frigid politeness by Mr. Wynum.

Miss Keel having come down from her mother's room, tea was served. The old lady

was more than usually feeble that evening ; consequently her daughter could not remain long in the drawing-room ; and as Mr. Wynum, with lofty exclusiveness, was making himself agreeable to Miss Maunsell, Margaret retired to her table at the opposite end of the room, where, beside her lamp, she had been reading all the evening. In this move she was accompanied by Monsieur Claude. Miss Maunsell was pleased at the arrangement, because it seemed to further her views. Mr. Wynum was contented : he had sent the rebels into banishment.

It was past ten when the French gentleman rose to leave, Margaret having previously invited him to resume his reading next evening. Mr. Wynum was more lordly than ever as he bade him good-night, and was scarcely more gracious in acknowledging Margaret's parting salutations.

Next evening brought Monsieur Claude, and the hours passed as before. Schiller was read, analyzed, and compared with other poets, ancient and modern ; and each of the young people contributed so fair a share to the conversation that each had ample grounds for admiring the other.

These appointments were kept punctually

for several evenings in succession. The reading of Schiller and the discussion of literary topics in general made the time pass agreeably for the persons so occupied. Margaret had now a great deal of work on hand, because, in addition to the translations on which she was engaged, she had commenced to write for a magazine, and had reason to believe she should become a regular monthly contributor. Cut off as she was from society, and deprived of all intellectual conversation since the break-off with Mr. Wynum, she enjoyed the stimulus afforded by Monsieur Claude's visits, and returned to her desk with a fresh glow, consequent on healthful intellectual exercise. A vision of literary success began to float before her eyes, and, in the loftiness of a stern will, she thought not of love or lovers. She did not read Monsieur Claude's devotedness aright, and she thought no more of the man to whom a few weeks before she had been engaged to be married. As is often the case with persons of strong imagination, Miss Morton went beyond the disagreeable present, and lived in the future, which she coloured as she pleased.

One of those meetings so delightful to Monsieur Claude had concluded. The young Frenchman had left, wholly unmindful of the

frigidity of Mr. Wynum's farewell. He was in an ecstasy of delight because of the evening he had passed, and the prospect of many of the like character opening before him. No sooner was he gone than Margaret bade good-night to Miss Maunsell and Mr. Wynum. Within twenty minutes there was a knock at her door. It was Miss Maunsell, who begged her to come down, as Mr. Wynum was taken very ill. Margaret, who was partly undressed, promised to be with her in a few seconds. On entering the drawing-room, she found Mr. Wynum seated in an easy-chair, wrapped in a dressing-gown, his face flaming red, and Miss Maunsell standing beside him, the picture of consternation.

"What's the matter?" asked Margaret.

"I don't know, my dear, I'm sure," said Miss Maunsell, looking most piteous. "He left the room immediately after you went upstairs, and, before I had time to turn off the gas, returned in this state. What can it be?"

Margaret laid her hand on Mr. Wynum's forehead, and started as she felt the burning heat. She placed her fingers on his wrist; the strong, wild beating of that old man's pulse made her step back.

"What's the matter, Charles?" she said in a low voice, as she bent over him.

He opened his eyes, and the large blue orbs sent up a glance into hers, so penetrating, so pleading, so reproachful, that Margaret's heart sank. The sight of so much emotion in the old and experienced man of the world smote her severely. She had misunderstood Mr. Wynum. He loved her with a love almost too strong for his physical strength. There was a sudden reaction in her feelings. She saw that the breaking off of the engagement had affected him profoundly, whilst she believed he had regarded it only as the cessation of a commercial contract. Now, standing beside him, looking at the swollen veins in his temples palpitating strongly, seeing the deep burning red of his cheeks, she was almost appalled by the sight of what she regarded as her own work. Here was the old friend of her uncle and aunt, and how had she behaved to him? Here was the man whom she had helped to nurse through a long illness, and for whom, when she thought his life in danger, she had grieved sincerely.

These recollections and self-accusations passed rapidly through Margaret's mind. She was standing beside the invalid, whose eyes

were half closed. Miss Maunsell, who was every moment becoming more alarmed, stepped forward.

“But, my dear sir, what *is* the matter? what is really the matter?”

“I have fever, Miss Maunsell, brain fever; I know I have.”

Miss Maunsell retreated a few steps, and turned her hands and eyes towards the ceiling.

“I don’t think so,” said Margaret, calmly. “I propose Mr. Wynum comes down to the dining-room. We’ll set a match to the fire, and remain with him. He’ll soon be better.”

“Do you think so, dear?” asked Miss Maunsell, who in this crisis submitted to Margaret’s judgment. “I’ll call Miss Keel and the servants.”

“No, Miss Maunsell; there’s no occasion. I’ll run down and put a match to the fire.”

“Surely, dear, he’s hot enough already.”

“He’ll be cool enough presently.”

“Shall we send for the doctor? or what shall we give him?”

“There’s no occasion for the doctor, Miss Maunsell. ‘Tis only nervousness. He’ll have a little wine and water when he gets downstairs.”

Margaret spoke with a certain air of

authority. She left the room, and soon returned to announce that the fire was thoroughly alight. Then Mr. Wynum, supported by the two ladies, moved towards the door. At the top of the stairs he was obliged to resign Miss Maunsell's aid and trust entirely to Margaret and the balustrade. So helped, he reached the dining-room, where an easy-chair was rolled before the fire. The invalid being comfortably seated, and the ladies suitably accommodated, Miss Maunsell again proposed to send for the doctor, and again received the assurance that it was unnecessary.

It was four hours past midnight before Miss Maunsell and Margaret retired to their rooms. Mr. Wynum was by that time sufficiently well, as he declared, to be able to sleep tranquilly. It was much to the credit of his medical advisers that the dangerous symptoms had been so rapidly got under. And when Mr. Wynum, standing bolt upright, shook hands with Miss Maunsell, and said he was sure of sleeping well for the rest of the night, the lady was much surprised, and could only mutter, "I hope so, sir."

If Miss Maunsell was surprised at the rapid disappearance of Mr. Wynum's feverish symptoms at night, she was still more astonished

the following morning, when, on entering the breakfast-room, she found her late patient there, carefully dressed, and reading the *Times*. Miss Maunsell apologized for being late. Everybody was late that morning, even Margaret, who, after she went to bed, was long without being able to close her eyes. Miss Keel, too, was late; but everybody knew she was often obliged to keep watch throughout the night when her mother suffered from spasms.

Amidst all these late arrivals Mr. Wynum smiled like the first flower of spring; and when Miss Maunsell, overwhelmed with confusion, protested she had intended to send a cup of tea to his room, he thanked her gracefully, and said she had so completely cured his little attack of the previous evening that he felt as though he had never been ill.

No one could be more affectionately attentive than was Mr. Wynum during the entire forenoon to Margaret; but he made no allusion to the events of the past evening. He talked on various subjects; and when Mr. Wynum let himself out to what he believed a congenial mind he indulged in a wide range of thought. And whilst Margaret now admired, as she had often done, the extent of his learning and the

accuracy of his knowledge, she marvelled at the sensitiveness of the self-love that shunned all allusion to what had taken place the night before. It would seem as though Mr. Wynum was ashamed of that involuntary outburst of feeling.

Miss Maunsell's officious care provided an early lunch, and Mr. Wynum invited the three ladies—Miss Keel making the third—to accompany him in a drive. Margaret would fain have refused. She longed for a couple of hours' solitude to reflect on the alteration in her relations with Mr. Wynum, and the fresh responsibilities she had incurred; but she did not dare to refuse, even on the plea of having much writing to do, and therefore accepted the invitation.

The day passed over happily, and evening found the whole party sitting in social converse, when a ring was heard at the gate. Mr. Wynum instantly proposed whist; and arrangements were so quickly made that, when Monsieur Claude entered the drawing-room, he found Miss Maunsell dealing the cards. Miss Keel, who was Margaret's partner, would have given up her hand, but Monsieur Claude would not hear of it, and said he found as much pleasure in looking on as in playing, which was

perfectly true when he sat beside Miss Morton and enjoyed the privilege of looking over her cards, and being made, in some sort, a partner in her fortunes, being silently forewarned of the card she intended to play by the pointing of her finger before she threw it down. Mr. Wynum had not gained much by his movement. He felt it, and after the first rubber leaned languidly back in his chair. Miss Maunsell proposed to suspend the play; Mr. Wynum would not allow it to be done on his account, but after a while he retired to the couch, and that with so much fuss and movement that Miss Maunsell rose and shook his pillows herself. The gentle invalid, with half-closed eyes, thanked her, and, holding her hand, pressed it downwards, as though he would compel her to sit beside him. Miss Maunsell kindly obeyed; and now, with Margaret seated on a chair at the head of the couch—she, too, had been engaged in the pillow-shaking—Mr. Wynum, comfortably propped, said he thought he would rest a little. His mode of resting was singular. It consisted in improving on an inquiry made by Miss Maunsell regarding Madame Charleroi's health, and to which inquiry her son's reply was to the effect that his mother was, as usual, very delicate. Thereupon Mr.

Wynum made a discourse on the sacred duty of filial love, appealed to Miss Maunsell, and felt sure she had been a model daughter; then Miss Maunsell's eyes became moist as she remembered the long past, and Mr. Wynum proceeded further to say he was sure that were her mother living, and in delicate health, her evenings would be consecrated to tending and amusing her, not in seeking idle recreation in neighbours' houses.

All this was said in a quiet, reflective manner, and addressed directly to Miss Maunsell; but every word was distinctly heard by all present, for no one attempted to set up an independent conversation. Had Mr. Wynum wished to bring forward an instance of a model daughter, he need only have pointed to Miss Keel,—there was no occasion to raise a fictitious case; but nobody ever thought of Miss Keel. Besides being, in common with the rest of the world, oblivious of Miss Keel's good qualities, Mr. Wynum had in view the very laudable object of wrapping Miss Maunsell in a cloud of emotion, whilst he shot the arrows of his satire at Monsieur Claude. The young man was pierced to the heart a thousand times over; Miss Keel and Margaret sat by and sympathized, but dared not interpose a word.

These three persons were made most uncomfortable, and, with the exception of Margaret, might have found a difficulty in defining the source of their annoyance ; for Mr. Wynum's dreamy manner and slowly-pronounced words bore the character of speculative opinions, not of positive assertions.

Ten o'clock arrived, and Monsieur Claude took his departure, feeling that his visits to Miss Keel's were brought to a close for the present. Mr. Wynum, though worthy of respect by reason of his learning and accomplishments, to say nothing of his age, was certainly an irritable invalid. So thought Monsieur Claude as he walked homewards.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I HAD no idea, my dear," said Mr. Wynum to Margaret, as they sat together after breakfast, "that your aunt was able to leave you such a handsome sum. 'Twill be, one day, 10,000*l.* Harry explained everything to me yesterday. I was quite surprised that you had kept it secret."

"A few days ago, just as I was about to tell you, you said you knew all about it."

"Did I? I suppose I fancied 'twas only a few hundreds. By the way, there were a few hundreds which I heard mentioned at the time of your aunt's death."

"Yes; Mr. Browne invested them in Consols. He preferred that security, and I've added something since."

"Bravo, Margaret, bravo! 'Twould perhaps have been more convenient had you arranged to draw the interest quarterly or half-yearly from your brother. I shall never

touch a farthing of your money: you 'll have it all for your personal expenses, my dear. Though consolidating the principal and interest for a term of years, as you have done, may be very well, because it will give you a large sum at once, still the interest would have been convenient."

"I find I can live on very little," said Margaret. "Mr. Browne consented to the arrangement of the bond. Harry wished particularly it should be kept secret, for fear of injuring the credit of the firm. I thought it right to speak to you; and when you said you knew all about it, I fancied Mr. Browne had told you. I hope you don't suspect me of any concealment?"

"My dear Margaret! not at all. 'Twas I who made a mistake."

"I should like to tell Miss Maunsell."

"Quite right. Every one should be told now."

"I wish Mr. Browne were here."

"He's sure to turn up."

"He has been away three months. I *do* wish he were here! He 'd break it to Miss Maunsell."

"Break what? I don't see anything to be broken."

Margaret made no reply.

Mr. Wynum was not only in good spirits, but was elated in mind. He had carried his point : Margaret Morton was to be his wife. His contentment was heightened by the knowledge that his future wife was owner of a considerable sum of money to be paid at a certain fixed period. Mr. Wynum did not take into consideration the remoteness of the date when his wife could claim the money ; all he cared to think of at the moment was that the money would be hers sooner or later. Mr. Wynum was certainly a worshipper of money, and there were times when the glitter seemed to possess as much attraction for him as the reality.

There was another reason why Mr. Wynum was glad to learn that Margaret had money. It healed the wound inflicted on his vanity, by the result of the attempt to sell his annuity. He was about to marry a girl young enough to be his daughter, and could make no provision for her in case of his death. The discovery that she was entitled to money altered the case. He could now make a settlement. He could settle her own money on his future wife, and even the length of time that must intervene before she could derive any benefit from this

money put him in a better position in the eyes of the world. These considerations had influenced Mr. Wynum in consenting to the arrangements proposed by Mr. Morton in reference to his sister's dowry.

Margaret was very anxious to tell Miss Maunsell of her engagement, but she hesitated; she did not know how to set about it. She said so to Mr. Wynum, but that gentleman smiled, and readily undertook to make the disclosure. How he performed the duty we cannot pretend to say, but the effect on the lady to whom the communication was made was anything but soothing. Miss Maunsell having quitted the drawing-room, whither she had hastened with alacrity, obedient to Mr. Wynum's summons, sought Miss Keel, and with pallid face and quivering lips announced her determination to quit the house that instant. She had been deceived, betrayed, basely wronged, made a tool of; but she would not bear it any longer, she would leave that very hour; the house was infamous, accursed; no good could come to any one staying there, the sooner she was out of it the better!

So saying, she flounced out of the room, slapping the door behind her. Poor Miss Keel looked aghast. During Miss Maunsell's

long and violent tirade she had not uttered a word, but remained staring in a state of immobility. Now, turning to her mother, she asked what did it all mean, and, falling back in her chair, she burst into tears.

"Oh, mother, mother, what can it mean? Miss Maunsell is furious. She said the house is accursed. I never saw her in such a state before. What can it mean, mother?"

"It means, Agnes, that what I said would come to pass has come to pass. I knew it would, but Miss Maunsell wouldn't believe me; she wouldn't heed me,—nobody heeds me."

The last assertion of Mrs. Keel, though far from true in a general sense, was perfectly correct at the moment as regarded her actual audience. Her faithful daughter did not seem either to hear or heed her. Miss Keel sat stupefied, the tears drying on her cheeks, for she was too bewildered to weep, whilst her mother looked calmly on as she had done during Miss Maunsell's outburst. To say she was perfectly placid would not correctly describe the old lady's appearance. There was a gleam of exultation in her eye, a stealthy smile of self-satisfaction on her lip, and a slightly-heightened colour on her cheek, all of which symptoms showed that Mrs. Keel derived

some pleasure from what was just then going on around her.

“Oh, mother, what can it mean?” repeated Miss Keel, who was not only pale, but almost fainting.

“What does it mean, my dear! It means that Mr. Wynum is going to marry Miss Morton.”

Miss Keel started up and stared at her mother. She thought her dear parent had lost her reason.

“Yes, Agnes, yes; stare as much as you please. I’ve known it a long time. I’ve said it too.”

“I never heard you say it, mother,” said Agnes, timidly.

“I didn’t say it to you. Where was the use? You’re just like the rest; you wouldn’t have believed me. But ’tis done now. Margaret, your pet Margaret, is going to marry Mr. Wynum.”

Though Miss Keel was far from believing her mother’s assertion, still it gave her feelings relief, inasmuch as it was something positive, and for the moment replaced the vague terror into which Miss Maunsell’s vehement protestations and denunciations had thrown her.

“I’ll ask Margaret herself,” she said.

“Do, my dear,” said her mother.

Miss Keel had not an opportunity of immediately putting the intended question to Margaret, that young lady having gone off to the British Museum, telling the cook she would not return till dinner-time. As Miss Keel stood in the hall, looking quite perplexed, because that Margaret was not at home, a cab drove to the door, and Miss Maunsell suddenly appeared on the staircase. She hurried towards the house-door, sweeping past Miss Keel, when that meek personage observed,—

“Lunch is ready, Miss Maunsell.”

“Very likely, ma’am, very likely; but I don’t lunch here. I seek other company than what I find in this house!”

And, so saying, Miss Maunsell hurried into the cab.

Poor Miss Keel! Humiliated and confounded, she entered the dining-room, where lunch was laid. Mr. Wynum soon appeared. He was bland, dignified, gracious. He advised Miss Keel to lay aside the ale, and invited her to drink a glass of wine—Mr. Wynum always drank wine—and simple-minded Miss Keel, who during lunch had committed a succession of follies, scattering pepper into her drinking-glass, and more than once pouring ale on her

plate, accepted the invitation, staring deprecatingly at the gentleman at the opposite end of the table, who, elated by his late crushing victory over Miss Maunsell, maintained the lofty aspect of an Asiatic conqueror condescending to look kindly on a slave.

Dinner passed over, dully enough. Miss Maunsell was absent: Mr. Wynum assumed she was dining with her friend Madame Charleroi. Margaret was thoughtful and uncomfortable. She had heard the particulars of Miss Maunsell's interview with Mr. Wynum from that gentleman, who had also found amusement in extracting from Mrs. Keel an account of the scene with her daughter, which he retailed to Margaret, enriched with comments no ways complimentary to the chief actor. These accounts pained Margaret exceedingly. She longed to see Miss Maunsell. She was ready to make any and every concession. Mr. Wynum pooh-poohed these dispositions to self-humiliation. Old Maunsell would come round, he said. She was offended at not having been consulted from the first: her vanity was wounded.

It was close on ten o'clock when Miss Maunsell returned home that night. Margaret ran down to meet her, but Miss Maunsell, waving

her off with a “Deceitful creature!” took up a candle from the hall table, and went at once to her room. During the entire evening Mr. Wynum had contrived to keep Margaret beside him, and had found occupation for Miss Keel at the piano, so that the two friends had not a moment for private conversation. Now, as Margaret remounted the stairs, after receiving the rebuff from her indignant old friend, she clasped the hand of Miss Keel, who stood on the landing, an astonished looker-on.

“Agnes, will you come to my room to-night? I’ve something to say to you.”

Miss Keel returned the pressure of her friend’s hand, and both entered the drawing-room. When at length Mr. Wynum had retired, and Miss Keel had paid her last visit for the night to her mother, a knock was heard at Margaret’s door, and the friends confronted each other. By this time Miss Keel had become convinced of the truth of her mother’s assertions, and had wondered that what she now accepted as confirmatory had not before struck her as primary evidence. She looked for a moment at Margaret, burst into tears, and flung her arms round her dear pupil’s neck.

“Why did you not tell me, Margaret?”

“I’ve been most anxious to do so, but ’tis only to-day I’m free.”

Then the two young women sat down, and the small hours of the morning had been several times noted by the clock before they separated. They talked of Margaret’s childhood, of the old house in Eva Terrace, of her uncle and aunt, of all the personages that came within their circle in those days. Concerning her marriage, Margaret merely said it was to take place; into her motives she did not enter, nor did her friend ask any questions.

The way in which Miss Maunsell received the intelligence of Margaret’s approaching marriage was easy of explanation to those who knew how excitable was her temper, how fantastic her imagination; but Miss Maunsell had private causes for resentment, the gravity of which she only could estimate. On receiving Mr. Wynum’s communication, the negotiations which, unauthorized, she had been carrying on with Madame Charleroi rose before her like ghosts of the untimely slain, demanding vengeance. How could she ever again appear before the susceptible French lady; how offer explanations which she felt would not be believed?

Margaret had not taken offence when Miss

Maunsell called her “Deceitful creature!” She knew her conduct must appear strange, inexplicable. She was therefore most anxious to tell the whole story simply and candidly to her old friend. No feeling of resentment found place in her mind. Having put herself in a false light, she was ready to explain, to ask pardon. Before going to bed, she slipped a note under Miss Maunsell’s door, in which she begged an interview that she might explain all. She conjured her by the memory of the departed and the loved not to refuse. It was not often that Margaret gave way to an outburst of emotion. Miss Maunsell knew that; and when by the first rays of the morning sun, which found her still awake, she espied a note on her threshold, she hastened to read it, and as she read the tears flowed down her cheeks. Every selfish feeling, every angry impulse, gave place in Miss Maunsell’s generous heart to pity for Margaret. The poor child—she was always a child to Miss Maunsell—had been trepanned; that wily old man had deceived her, had practised on her feelings. These sentiments had so completely replaced those of the preceding day that when Margaret, at eight o’clock, knocked at her old friend’s door, and asked if she might come in, the answer was, “Yes, dear.”

Miss Maunsell, already up and dressed—she was too restless to sleep—embraced her visitor affectionately, as she said,—

“ My dear child ! my poor child ! I ’ve been expecting you.”

Then commenced a long conversation, in which Margaret entered into minute details, and told how her aunt had left her a large sum of money, and how she had kept the fact secret for fear of distressing her brother, in whose firm the money was. And, from the same motive, she had long refused to make public her engagement, because it would give Mr. Wynum the right to demand explanations from Harry which he might not be in a position to give ; “ but everything is understood now,” said Margaret, “ and Mr. Wynum is satisfied.”

“ Mr. Browne did very wrong,” said Miss Maunsell, in a matter-of-fact tone, when Margaret had come to the end of her narrative. “ He ought not to have consented to that bond. It puts you in a very bad position. Though, after all, no bond has been drawn.”

“ Dear Miss Maunsell, Mr. Browne was not to blame. I insisted : I couldn’t distress Harry.”

“ I wish, my dear, you could be as hard-hearted to Harry as he can be to you. But

we must make the best of it. You have given your word. Mr. Wynum was always a very clever man. There's the breakfast-bell. You had better go, dear. I shall breakfast in my room. I do wish Mr. Browne were here."

But Margaret would not go down, and prayed to be allowed to remain with Miss Maunsell; so the friends breakfasted together, much to Mr. Wynum's vexation, who regarded his claims on Miss Morton as paramount; however, he submitted with a tolerably good grace.

Miss Maunsell did not join the family party till dinner-time. She felt she required time for reflection, and to allow her emotions to subside; she therefore remained in her room all the afternoon. When she did appear, she acted the dignified lady to perfection, kept Mr. Wynum at a great distance, and patronized Margaret as "a dear child," to the great annoyance of her *fiancé*.

Any dweller at Campden Terrace, who at this period looked out of window between ten and eleven at night, might have seen a tall gentleman, wrapped in a cloak, who in the course of thirty minutes passed the Terrace several times. On his beat, he always stopped opposite a certain house, of which, the night being dark, for there was no moon, he could not catch

a glimpse from the opposite side of the way. Considering the state of the atmosphere, and the profound obscurity that prevailed, it could not be supposed that the gentleman was an artist, wishing to make a sketch of the place ; nor, for the same reason, could it be any one proposing to improve his architectural knowledge in the house-building line. The most reasonable conclusion would be that some house in the Terrace held an object, the especial love or hate of the gentleman who lingered there, staring into the darkness, his feelings occasionally enlivened by a shadow cast on the blinds as a figure passed between the lights and the window. These troubadour watchings had been of some nights' continuance, when Miss Maunsell's romantic instincts prompted her, one hour before midnight, to open her bedroom window. She descried the watcher, who, attracted by the lifting of the sash, had moved into the roadway. It was Monsieur Claude. Miss Maunsell hastily and softly closed her window. She sat down. Her difficulties were increasing. She had deferred her visit of explanation to Madame Charleroi from day to day, and here was an element of a highly disturbing character added to the complications that already beset her. Monsieur

Claude was again in town. Miss Maunsell, forgetting that the mischief was all of her own making, wondered Madame Charleroi did not keep her son more at Clapham, or send him to France, his native country.

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